



Siva's Five Powers



ISSUE 300 OUT: 10 SEPTEMBER 2012
COVER: Lord Siva as Pancha Brahma, with five faces representing His five great powers; (above) 108,000 oil lamps are lit to close the million-strong annual celebration in honor of the founder of the Vira Saiva Suttur Mutt in Karnataka

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INTERNATIONAL

Feature: Come with Us to a Million-Man Vira Saiva Festival at Suttur Math in Karnataka, South India **18**

Migration: Beleaguered Afghan Hindus Find a New Home in Far-off Germany **34**

Language: World's Leading Experts in Sanskrit Language and Literature Gather in Delhi **54**

LIFESTYLE

Insight: Exploring Creation in a Highly Esoteric Look at Pancha Brahma, the Five-Faced Lord Siva **36**

Marvels: The Lighter Side of Sanskrit Revealed in the Staggering Word-Play of the Ancient Poets **58**

Transition: Facing My Father's Final Days **60**

Music: Modern-Day Minstrel Brings Kabir's Soulful Songs into the 21st Century **62**

Law: How a US Supreme Court Decision Impacts Hindu Temples: A Suggestion to Management **64**

Food: Tasty Tips on the Oft-Maligned Mushroom **66**

OPINION

In My Opinion: The Day Proselytizing Troops Stormed My N.Y. Diwali Festival **9**

Publisher's Desk: Karma, Bhakti, Yoga and Jnana—Four Views of Four Spiritual Practices **10**

Letters

From the Agamas: The Evolution of the Soul after Physical Rebirth Is Finished **17**

Youth: I Grew Up Hindu, a Bit Against the Odds **53**

Society: One Hindu's View of Gay Marriage **68**

DIGESTS

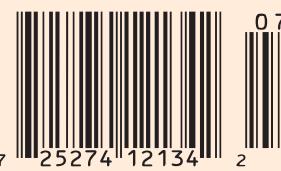
Global Dharma **6**

Quotes & Quips **14**

Digital Dharma **86**

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www.hinduismtoday.com



Best Hindu Magazine



Fierce warriors of Lord Siva, the Viragase Kunitha dancers invoke blessings and scare away evil forces at the massive festival in honor of a yogi born more than one thousand years ago, the founder of Suttur Math, whose organization is one of the most active Hindu monasteries of our time ...

[page 18](#)



The ancient town of Staraya Maina is situated near Ulyanovsk on the banks of the Samara, a tributary of the Volga river

RUSSIA

Hinduism in Early Russia

THOUGH THIS IS FIVE-YEAR-OLD NEWS, THIS EXCITING STORY HAS gone viral on the Internet. In 2007, after seven years of excavation in an old Volga region village, Professor Alexander Kozhevnikov of the Ulyanovsk State University's archaeology department announced that every single square metre of the 1,700-year-old town of Staraya Maina is studded with antiques, among them an ancient statue of Vishnu. While that discovery was verified, subsequently an elaborate hoax was spread on the Internet, building on Kozhevnikov's find, in the form of contrived correlations between Vedic India and Russia by one fictitious Dr. Acharya Pandey. You will find dozens of pages citing his specious analyses. Hoaxes aside, the finds at Staraya Maina have led to speculation that, millennia ago, Vedic culture reached from India all the way to the Baltic sea.

USA

Hindu Family Spearheads Interfaith in US Bible Belt

IN MIDLAND TEXAS, ON FEBRUARY 28, 2012, an unusual interfaith event was held for the second year running. Sitting together deep in America's Christian Bible Belt, the Rev. Randel Everett of Midland's First Baptist Church, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami of Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii, the Rev. James Bridges of St. Stephen's Catholic Church in Midland, Rabbi Holly Cohn of Temple Beth-El in Odessa and Imam Wazir Ali of Masjid Al-Islam and Masjid Al-Qur'an in Houston shared their views on five subjects with an audience of 500 guests. Video of the event was streamed live to the Internet.

Such a conclave would be unlikely in this area of the US but for the initiative of Drs. Mrunal and Padmaja Patel. Feeling that better interfaith understanding was needed, they had proposed the debut event last year, to their hospital colleagues. Everyone was receptive, though eyebrows were raised when the venue, St. Stephens Catholic Church in Midland, was chosen. A conservative Christian church hosting an interfaith gathering in Texas? Padmaja's diligent 2011 outreach was compelling, leaders agreed to come, and it was a great success. So much so that getting this year's event together



Bridging differences: Hindu initiative gets five leaders of different faiths together to share views, creating a model for what the world needs

was simply a matter of sending out emails and announcements.

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami advised Padmaja on the format. Each leader brought one key question about religion, which was then answered by

bit.ly/MidlandInterfaith

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ULYANOVSK STATE UNIVERSITY; GOOGLE IMAGES; TIM FISCHER/MIDLAND REPORTER-TELEGRAM

GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA
Another Modern Mega Site

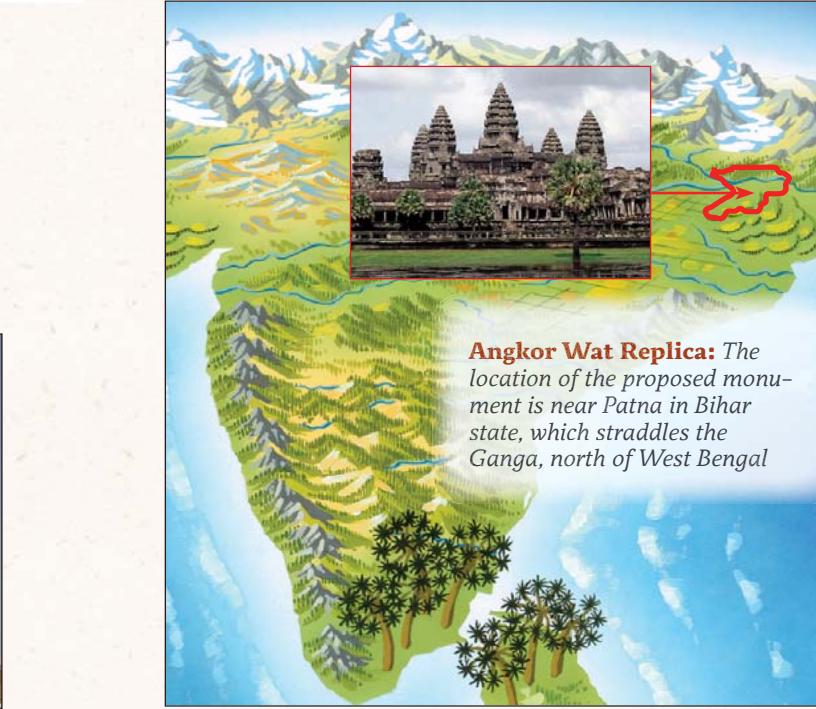


Ancient Murudeshwar temple (ground level) straddled by a fabulous rajagopuram (entrance tower) and mammoth hilltop statue of Lord Siva

YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF A modern trend that is transforming India's religious landscape is Murudeshwar on the coast of Karnataka. The resuscitation and expansion of this ancient holy site has been the sacrifice of Sri R. N. Shetty. Starting in 1977, he put his wealth to work renovating the crumbling temple, building a

www.murudeshwar.org

giant rajagopuram and adding awesome sculptures to the site. With schools, a hospital, modern landscaping and lodgings, Murudeshwar has become a dynamic center benefitting the local community and a destination for devotees from all over the world. See:



Angkor Wat Replica: The location of the proposed monument is near Patna in Bihar state, which straddles the Ganga, north of West Bengal

INDIA

Cambodians Upset Over India's Angkor Wat Plan

IN MARCH, 2012, THE MAHAVIR Mandir Trust, a wealthy, private religious institution in North India, held the ground breaking ceremony in Patna, Bihar, to initiate building of a replica of Angkor Wat. SiliconIndia.com reported that the plan is for the new temple to be even taller than the original. That would make it the world's largest Hindu temple. The replica of the 12th century Cambodian temple will be called Virat Angkor Wat Ram Mandir.

Cambodia's Minister of Culture and Fine Arts, Hm Chhem, told reporters in Phnom Penh that the plan is a "shameful act.... There is only one Angkor Wat in the world. It is Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple, which was listed as one of the world heritage sites in 1992." Angkor Wat attracts over two million visitors annually and the tourist trade is a key source of revenue for the small Buddhist nation, which is reportedly talking to the Indian government to resolve the issue.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ground-Breaking Handbook on Religion and Corporal Punishment of Children

IN MAY 2011 THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE TO END ALL CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN—in cooperation with Save the Children—Sweden, and The Churches' Network for Non-violence—released a remarkably thorough handbook on the relationships between religion and violence against children. The authors are not shy to expose how religion is implicated.

Garnering hard statistics, they show how the beliefs held by some of those belonging to the Abrahamic religions justify corporal punishment. The Christian right in the US, for example, has countered legal efforts to restrict or outlaw the practice on the basis that it was endorsed by the Bible. Other Christians do not agree.

The handbook covers the

more humane beliefs of all religious traditions that can serve as a platform for action. "It is vitally important to work with religious leaders and faith-based groups in prohibiting and eliminating corporal punishment."

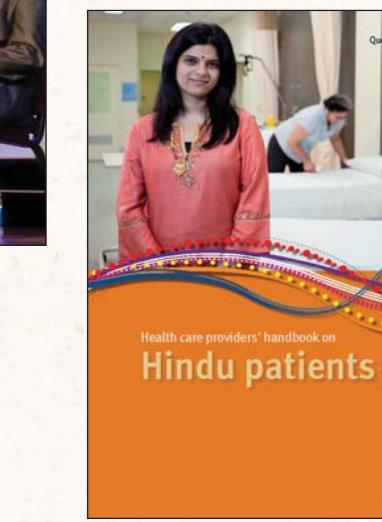
Despite a few old verses from our shastras on discipline that have been misconstrued as justification for physical punishment of children, ahimsa—non-violence—is a core principle of Hindu faith, and we are in a particularly good position to stand strong to make corporal punishment illegal. See:

bit.ly/save-children

ENDING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN



A handbook for working with and within religious communities



Health care providers' handbook on Hindu patients

AUSTRALIA

Best Healthcare Handbook for Hindu Patients

MAJOR KUDOS IS DUE TO Australia's Queensland Government Health Multicultural Services for their outstanding work in providing healthcare providers with a well-researched, accurate, thorough guide for treating Hindus. Section One describes the different Indian language groups and gives an overview of Hindu philosophical and cultural views on religious practice,

bathing and cleanliness, dietary needs, decision making, administration of medicines, clinical examinations, hygiene, the ceremonies Hindus expect to be able to perform shortly after childbirth, community services, care for the elderly, end-of-life issues and attitudes toward autopsy (unacceptable if not required by law).

Converting the above would have been adequate, but the

handbook goes the extra mile with a section on beliefs that healthcare providers should be aware of when treating Hindu patients—beliefs about food, karma, holy days, fasting, dress, mental illness, organ transplant, pain management and death and dying—all sensitively covered.

The handbook is licensed for noncommercial copying and adaptation. You may replace the contact pages for local hospitals and Hindu organizations to customize the handbook for service in your area. To download the book, go to:

bit.ly/hindu-health



Among her many skills, Jane Goodall speaks fluent Chimpanzee

FAMOUS VEGETARIANS

Jane Goodall Prefers Plants

THE WORLD'S FOREMOST EXPERT on chimpanzees, Jane Goodall, 78, a primatologist,

ethologist and anthropologist, is also a vegetarian. She is famous for her 1960 discovery



ENVIRONMENT

In Vitro Meat to Reduce Animal Farming in 25 Years?

LIVING MAMMALIAN TISSUE culture has been around for over thirty years, as has the idea of test-tube meat. But

the 2006 discovery of non-embryonic adult stem cells has changed the landscape. The ethical issues surrounding use



of embryos are out of the way. Now it is possible for scientists to go forward, making useful bio gadgets, such as new arteries from your own muscle tissue. And, another race is on: to make in vitro meat.

The global awareness that animal farming is a key cause of climate change and environmental

BRIEFLY...

NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD RINKEL

Kumari, a Hindu girl who was kidnapped in Pakistan by a local Muslim mafia group and forced to marry a wealthy Muslim scholar, pleaded in court, in March, 2012, that she be executed rather than be forced to return to him. Her father who accused the perpetrators had to flee to the Punjab. Every

year over 300 Hindu and some Christian girls are kidnapped, forcibly converted and married.

ACCUSING THE ADMINISTRATION of irregularities on April 13, 2012, the government of Karnataka took over the administration of Bengaluru's Veeranjaneyaswamy Temple. The temple management protested, saying that the

administration had been conducted in a transparent manner. Note that the government will never touch Muslim or Christian places of worship, only Hindus have their places of worship taken over by what is supposed to be a secular state.

DARSHAN FOR THE daily crush of 65,000 pilgrims at Tirupati has

dropped to .8 to 15 seconds seconds. The fleeting glimpse comes after waiting in the queue for up to 21 hours.

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that chimps can make and use tools, a trait that was, until then, thought to be a defining trait of mankind. Further, she claims her research proves that not only humans but animals "have personality, and are capable of rational thought and emotions like joy and sorrow."

Ms. Goodall describes her overnight decision to stop eating meat, "In the early 1970s, I learned about the horrors of intensive animal production from Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*. I had never heard of a factory farm before and as I turned the pages I became increasingly incredulous, horrified and angry. I can still remember how I felt when I closed Singer's book. I thought that when I saw meat on my plate, from that moment on, I

should think of pain-fear-death. How horrible. So it was clear. I would eat no more meat."

With a powerful vision and purpose, Jane Goodall travels 300 days a year, despite her age, lecturing on conservation, not only to save the chimpanzees, but for the whole planet. She has won numerous international awards for her work (see: jane-goodall.ca/goodall-awards.php.)

She has a special talent for connecting with youth and one of her greatest achievements has been the Roots & Shoots movement, a program of the Jane Goodall Institute that is mobilizing youth action groups in 114 countries across the globe. To learn more, go to:

www.janegoodall.org
www.rootsandshoots.org

From the lab to your plate:
(right to left) stem cells extracted from adult livestock grow until they are ready for the grill

degradation, along with animal welfare issues combined with the projected non-stop growth in human consumption of animal flesh, has launched the science of in vitro meat onto the world stage. You may see such products in supermarkets as early as 2014. While most vegetarians look disgustedly at flesh from any source, even hard-core animal rights advocates are saying test-tube meat could result in ending much animal abuse.

Learn all about stem cells here: stemcells.nih.gov; and search "in vitro meat" on the web.



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927-2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Christian Affront on Diwali

Let us embrace those of other faiths, but not at the expense of our own great tradition

BY VIJU SIDHWANI, M.D.

EVER SINCE WE WERE young we attended the annual Diwali mela at South Street Seaport. Each year our family drove in to downtown Manhattan from the surrounding suburbs. Breathing in the panoramic views of the Big Apple, with the backdrop of a glorious sunset, we knew an evening of live dance performances, puppet shows and a display of exquisite fireworks bursting on a blanket of stars was soon to follow. This was our idea of Diwali.



This celebration is special to me not only because it is the biggest Hindu celebration of the year, but also because it is a tradition that binds me to other Hindu and Sikh youth of the New York area. Nearly every year I have enjoyed the crowds, delicious food and divine music that is characteristic of the street fair. However, this year for the first time I came across a group who prominently identified themselves as Indian Christian missionaries. They came not for the purpose of enjoying the mela or for observing the sacredness of the occasion, but with the intention of converting Hindus and Sikhs to Christianity.

Among the other street vendors, this group set up a table to distribute Christian literature and free water to passersby. One person among them brought color-coordinated T-shirts proclaiming that Jesus is the only one. As the day progressed, the growing number of motivated evangelists infiltrated the crowds in the streets.

For much of the afternoon I saw them mobbing innocent visitors, foisting upon them bottled water and literature. I was handed a pamphlet by two men, one of them asking if I was interested in attaining peace. I accepted the literature and briefly perused it before asking them why they were preaching Christianity at a Diwali mela. One of the men rudely responded that America is a free country and that he had the right to freedom of speech. His counterpart cited the technicality that Diwali was over three

weeks away and arrogantly added that his presence was not disturbing anyone because this was a community event open to everyone. I eventually told one of them that I was very happy being Hindu, to which he replied, "I'm here to offer you something better." Turned off and insulted, I ended the conversation, indicating to them that their presence was unwarranted and their aggressive propagation of Christianity on such a noble occasion was impolite and indecent.

The competitive antagonism brought by the missionaries detracted from our festive celebration of the festival of lights as they made efforts to persuade members of our community to attend church and eventually convert to Christianity. Coerced conversion of faith is fundamentally offensive to the benevolent and peaceful dharmic traditions. While we as a unified community are pluralistic in our beliefs and encourage diversity amongst ourselves, we cannot welcome people who alienate us from our native ancestry and intend to annihilate a tradition that is thousands of years old.

We cannot continue to be so accepting of other schools of thought that we compromise the principles that allow our own people to flourish and our own faith to be nourished. Hindu and Sikh American youth need the opportunity to explore our culture and beliefs and to enjoy our festivals without facing intimidation by those who wish to lure them toward a belief system that does not accept our tradition's antiquity, greatness and accepting nature.

On the auspicious occasion of Diwali, let us propagate the true spirit of love and embrace our brothers and sisters, be they of different faiths, on the condition that we are venerated to a degree that is commensurate with our benevolent outlook of love and acceptance for all.

VIJU SIDHWANI, 32, is a physiatrist and interventional pain specialist in New York City.

Which Yoga Should I Follow?

Exploring four popular approaches to four spiritual regimens: karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLAN SWAMI

IN MODERN HINDU TEXTS, THE MOST COMMON summary of Hindu spiritual practice is the four yogas: karma (action), bhakti (devotion), raja (meditation) and jnana (knowledge). Let's start with a short description of each and then ponder the question, "Which yoga or yogas should I pursue at this time?"

Karma yoga is the path of action. It begins with refraining from what should not be done. Next we seek to renounce actions motivated solely by selfish desires, those actions that benefit only ourselves. Then comes the desire to conscientiously fulfill our duties in life. An important aspect of karma yoga is performing selfless service to help others. When we are successful, our work is transformed into worship. My paramaguru, Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, captured the essence of this ideal when he said, "All work must be done with the aim of reaching God."

Bhakti yoga is the path of devotion to and love of God. Practice focuses on listening to stories about God, singing devotional hymns, pilgrimage, intoning a mantra and worshiping in temples and one's home shrine. The fruition of bhakti yoga is an ever-closer rapport with the Divine, developing qualities that make communion possible—love, selflessness and purity—eventually leading to *prapatti*, self-effacement and total surrender to God. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave this insightful description: "God is love, and to love God is the pure path prescribed in the *Agamas* (a category of revealed scripture). Veritably, these texts are God's own voice admonishing the *samsari*, reincarnation's wanderer, to give up love of the transient and adore instead the Immortal. How to love the Divine, when and where, with what mantras and visualizations and at what auspicious times, all this is preserved in the *Agamas*."

Raja yoga is the path of meditation. It is a system of eight progressive stages of practice: ethical restraints, religious observances, posture, breath control, withdrawal, concentration, meditation and ecstasy, or mystic oneness. The focus is on restraining the modifications of the mind so that our awareness—which usually takes on the forms of the mind's modifications—can abide in its essential form. The restraint of these modifications is achieved through practice and detachment. My guru used the term *consciousness* to explain the modifications of the mind: "Consciousness and awareness are the same when awareness is totally identified with and attached to that which it is aware of. To separate the two is the artful practice of yoga."

Jnana yoga is the path of knowledge. It involves philosophical study and discrimination between the Real and the unreal. Though the word *jnana* is derived from the verbal root *jñā*, which simply means knowing, it has a higher philosophical connotation. It is not only intellectual knowledge but also intuitive experience. It starts



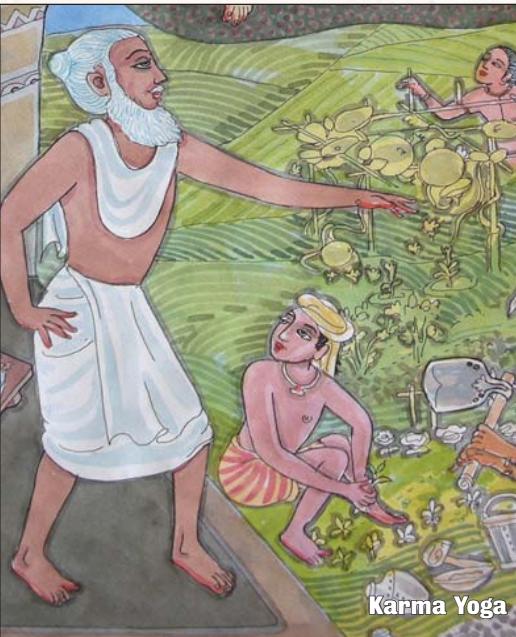
with the former and ends with the latter. Jnana yoga consists of three progressive practices: *shravana* (listening to scripture); *manana*—thinking and reflecting; and *nididhyasana*—constant and profound meditation. Four great saying from the *Upanishads* are often the subject of reflection: "Consciousness is Brahman;" "That thou art;" "This Self is Brahman;" and "I am Brahman." Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmay Mission, taught: "The goal of jnana yoga is, through discrimination, to differentiate between the Real and the unreal and finally come to realize one's identity with the Supreme Reality."

Having looked in brief at each of the four primary yogas, let's focus on how they are approached in various schools of thought. This may help you to choose the yoga (or yogas) that is right for you to practice at this state of your spiritual unfoldment.

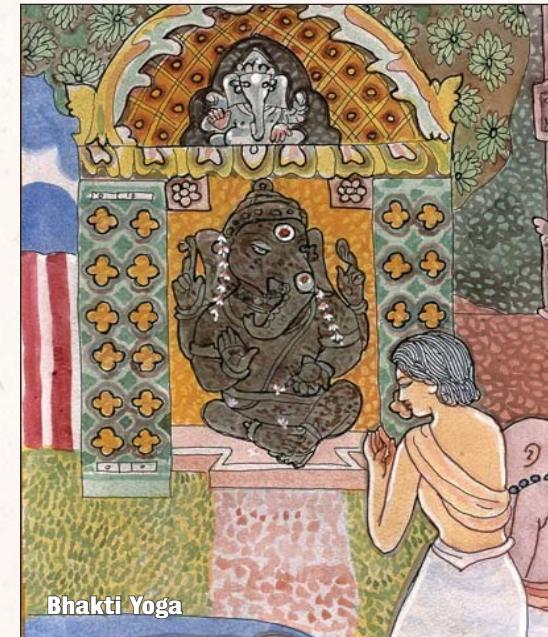
The first and most widely known approach is to choose one of the yogas based on your temperament. The Vedanta Society of Southern California puts forth this approach on its website: "Spiritual aspirants can be broadly classified into four psychological types: the predominantly emotional, the predominantly intellectual, the physically active, the meditative. There are four primary yogas designated to 'fit' each psychological type." In this approach, bhakti yoga is recommended for the predominantly emotional, jnana yoga for the intellectual, karma yoga for the physically active and raja yoga for the meditative person.

However, it is sometimes advised that seekers who are intellectually inclined should stay away from jnana yoga. Linda Johnson explains this in her book *Hinduism for Idiots*. "Think you're smart? Surprisingly, Hindu gurus often advise bright people to take up the path of devotion, not jnana yoga. That's because very intelligent people often benefit more by learning to open their hearts. Jnana yoga is not so much for intellectuals as for people with a strongly developed mystical sense and a burning desire for the actual experience of God Realization."

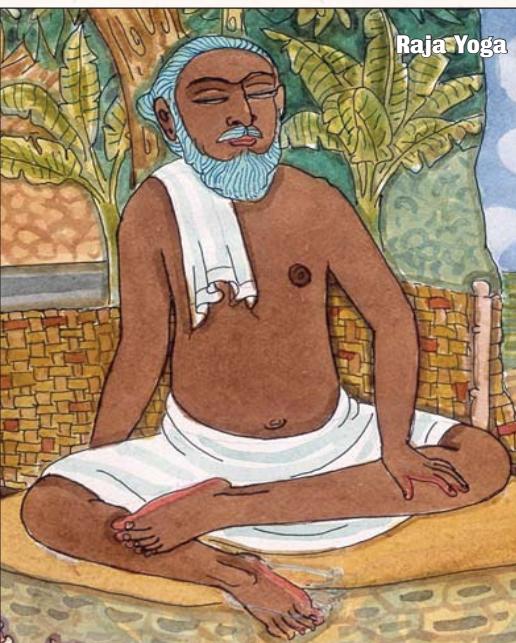
A second approach is to choose one of the yogas as your primary focus based on your temperament but to also practice the other three yogas in a secondary way. Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, maintained that though seekers naturally gravitate toward one path, the lessons of each of the paths must be integrated by every seeker if true wisdom is to be attained. The motto of his organization is, "Serve, Love, Meditate, Realize," referring respectively



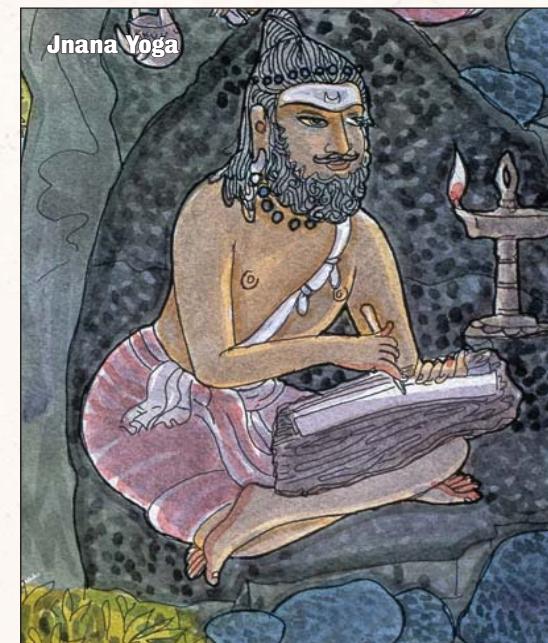
Karma Yoga



Bhakti Yoga



Raja Yoga



Jnana Yoga

Progressive stages: The four yogas, clockwise from upper left: In the karma yoga stage, seekers till the land; in bhakti yoga, the Deities are worshiped; in raja yoga, the senses are withdrawn, in jnana yoga, wisdom is unfolded through perfect discrimination.

which is defined as meditation based on philosophical discrimination. This idea is found in Shankara's *Vivekachudamani*: "Work is for the purification of the mind, not for the perception of Reality. The realization of Truth is caused by discrimination, not in the least by ten millions of acts."

A fourth approach is that the practice of karma yoga, bhakti yoga and raja yoga constitute a prerequisite for taking up jnana yoga or experiencing unity with God, enlightenment. Swami Ramakrishnananda of the Vishwa Dharma Mandalam in New York City wrote: "Before delving into jnana yoga, it is important that a disciple grows and develops in service, or karma yoga, in devotion to God, or bhakti yoga, and in meditation, or raja yoga, because in studying this philosophy without preparation one risks transforming oneself into a 'lip Vedantist,' a person who talks about that which he does not truly know."

Swami Vishnu Devananda of Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres propounded a similar idea: "Before practicing jnana yoga, the aspirant needs to have integrated the lessons of the other yogic paths—for without selflessness and love of God, strength of body and mind, the search for Self Realization can become mere idle speculation."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami saw wisdom in this fourth approach. He stated, "Karma yoga and bhakti yoga are the necessary prelude to the higher philosophies and practices." In fact, he taught that the yogas (or padas) are cumulative stages. Moreover, none should be abandoned as one advances on the path. About bhakti, he said, "We never outgrow temple worship. It simply becomes more profound and meaningful as we progress through four spiritual levels. In [karma yoga or] the *charya pada*, the stage of selfless service, we attend the temple because we have to, because it is expected of us. In [bhakti] the *kriya pada*, the stage of worshipful *sadhana*, we attend because we want to; our love of God is the motivation. In the *yoga pada*, we worship God internally, in the sanctum of the heart; yet even the yogi immersed in the superconscious depths of mind has not outgrown the temple. It is there—God's home on the earth plane—when the yogi returns to normal consciousness. So perfect is the temple worship of those who have traversed the *jnana pada* that they themselves become worship's object—living, moving temples."

Confused as to which yoga or yogas to choose? Of course if you have a teacher, this is an excellent point of discussion to have with him or her. If you don't have a teacher, then a conservative approach is to work first on karma yoga and bhakti yoga. These yogas work swiftly with the ego and clear all-important barriers to deeper realization, barriers too many neglect to resolve on the path. The benefits of their practice include a slow purification of the mind, developing of greater humility and selflessness and a growing sense of devotion and certainty that all our actions are steadily moving us closer to God.

LETTERS

Thank You!

How may we thank you for the Apr/May/Jun 2012 issue of *HINDUISM TODAY*? A beautiful cover story on Bali, and in that Rev. Dada Vaswani's nice insert. May the Master's blessings continue to pour upon you and your work abundantly.

NARESH SINGHANI
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Thank you so much for your magazine. Each time I buy an issue, I read it from cover to cover. For a long time, I have been thirsty for inspiration and a spiritual way of life. At various times, I thought that I had found it in this or that, but each time, I was eventually left unsatisfied. Finally, when I came across *HINDUISM TODAY*, I found what I had been looking for: something broad, not narrow—Hinduism itself, the Great Mother Faith.

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Beautiful Bali

I am the publisher of *Media Hindu*, a monthly Hindu magazine here in Indonesia. Rajiv Malik's report on Hinduism in Bali is excellent, and I would like to have your permission to translate and publish the articles in my magazine so that many Hindus in Indonesia can be exposed to them.

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I wanted to tell you how much I am enjoying this edition of *HINDUISM TODAY*. I have been to Bali and was blessed to have an amazing three weeks of visiting temples, seeing dance and music, seeing and participating in many different religious events, learning about Balinese Hinduism from many different local people. I witnessed and experienced many of the things that your articles cover, including funeral rites, and learned about the many rites and rituals that mark a person's passing into the next worlds. I fell in love with the Bali that is far, far away from the tourist areas, and feel that it is one of those few places on Earth that are tangibly close to Siva.

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Thank you very much for the excellent special issue on Bali (Apr/May/Jun 2012). Articles by Rajiv Malik are very informative, and the pictures are beautiful.

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Kailash Pilgrimage

"Kailash Yatra" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2012) was a welcome guide and refresher for me; I made the trek in August 2011 via Kathmandu. There have been tremendous changes since the author made the pilgrimage in 2004. Except for a short stretch of about 64 km, the roads are all paved and in excellent condition, many times better than the roads in Nepal and India. Telecommunication is excellent. The town of Saga has a decent hotel with bathroom/toilet facilities. However, other stops, including those on the *parikrama* path, have guest houses as described in the article. Sadly, I have to agree that even now the divinity of the place is spoiled by rubbish left behind by pilgrims.

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Thank you for this most elaborate article. Reading it reminded me of historical events in the lives of two saints who lived in the 14th and 15th centuries in Tamil Nadu. Saint Thirunavukkarasar, well known as Appar, wanted to go on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash. Due to his feeble old age he could not reach the mountain. He heard a voice instructing him to return to Tamil Nadu and have a dip in the river Thiruvaiyar. As he got out of the water, he had a vision of Siva and Parvati at Mount Kailash, which inspired his 239 verses collectively named "Potri Thiruththandagam."

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Another event involves the life of the poet-saint Auvaiyar, an ardent devotee of God Ganesha. Once she performed her daily puja in a hurried manner. Ganesha asked her the reason for her hastiness. She replied that two other saints had started on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash and that she wanted to join them. Ganesha encouraged her to continue the puja as usual and assured her that He would help her reach Kailash. When Auvaiyar finished her puja, Ganesha lifted her with His trunk and placed her near Mount Kailash before the other saints arrived.

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Hindu American Identity

Congratulations to Rohini Sircar for her prize-winning essay ("Beyond My Dual Identities," Jan/Feb/Mar 2012). As a graduate student at the University of Michigan, even when it was snowing heavily, I wore a sari and had kumkum on my forehead. When questioned about my attire by white and black Americans and fellow students from India, I would say, "I am proud of my roots; I do not wish to lose my identity as a Hindu woman." Whenever schools and cultural societies invited

me, I spoke highly about Indian culture and Hinduism. It always shocked me to find how little educated Americans know about India.

I had the same experience that this young lady had whenever people asked me where I was from. I always introduce myself as an American scientist of Indian origin. In a melting pot of culture, however difficult it may be, I refuse to give up my identity as a Hindu woman, while continuing to live as an American, assimilating the good of American culture.

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Marriage Reference Book

With the utmost humility, as I welcome the book *Vivaha Samskara* on the very relevant and important rite of passage in any Hindu's life ("Hindu Wedding," Apr/May/Jun 2012), I disagree with the author that there is a lack of a reference book in English. My father, Dr. Prem Sahai, wrote the book *Hindu Marriage Samskara* in English and Hindi with a similar purpose in mind. As a matter of fact, a special message for the book was written by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyasami, founder of *HINDUISM TODAY*. I congratulate Mr. Deepak Kotwal for his much needed addition to the literary work in this field.

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Pro-Brahmin Attitude?

In response to Sai Ravikumar's letter (Apr/May/Jun 2012), caste seems to be overestimated in our society. Certainly, it exists, but one should ponder upon the degree to which it was practiced. Consider the *Mahabharata*, in which Karna was promoted to the kshatriya caste, and the *Periya Puranam*, which includes stories of saints who came from non-brahmin castes. We should blame the English for using and manipulating caste into what is a cancer in today's society. For 200 years they defiled our view of our religion with propaganda and such abuses, making us look at our religion as evil instead of what it really is, the faith that is the most compassionate toward all beings.

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Gay Marriage in Minnesota

Thank you very much for the article by Anant Rambachan about a Hindu view on the Marriage Amendment in Minnesota (page 67 of this issue). Of course, it isn't an official Hindu statement on the issue, and I'm sure some Hindus have different opinions on the

matter, but the more I learn about Hinduism, the more appreciative I am of its inherent tolerance. What a beautiful religion!

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Differences in Vedic Chanting

I have always been amazed by the differences in the way Vedic mantras are chanted in North India and South India. We do know North Indian brahmins to be Pancha Gauda and South Indian to be Pancha Dravida. However, I do not understand why would there be a difference in the ways mantras are chanted. Is it just the mere geographical barrier of Vindhya ranges which resulted in varied practices?

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Tirupati's Wealth

Whenever donations to Tirupati are mentioned, I request that you note they are used by the government "to balance its budgets" and are given freely to non-Hindu causes, including Christian churches. Indian government officers sit on the board of this and other Hindu temples, while the revenue, properties, schools, etc., of other religions are left alone.

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Animal Sacrifice

I read with interest your article, "The Reality of Animal Sacrifice" (Apr/May/Jun 2012). According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, God resides in every creature (refer to verses 2.30, 6.31, 10.20, 13.18). Thus, killing an animal is no different than murdering a fellow human being, deemed a heinous crime in every civilized society. "Ahimsa parmo dharma," "nonviolence is the supreme way," is a prime doctrine of Hinduism.

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Goan Temples

Thank you for the article on Goan temples (Oct/Nov/Dec 2011). My ancestry is from Goa, and my father was disciplined about leading the entire family on annual pilgrimage to our *kuladevata* (Shakti) temple. The serenity and power of the temples we spent time in, including the Shantadurga and Mangeshi temples, is hard to describe. What always struck me was that just setting foot in Goa felt special every single time. The opportunity to communicate with the Deity and seek Her guidance for all important decisions in his life was something my father cherished and looked forward to during these pilgrimages. The first significant step in the process of getting prasad is to seek the grace or permission from the Deity to proceed with asking for Her guidance. Being able to do so

typically implies that the devotee is observing dharma. In my personal experience, there have sometimes been delays in receiving this permission. Often it was something as simple as one of the family members' not offering to the Deity what She asked for in a dream. No sooner than the dream was recalled, forgiveness sought and the offering made did the Deity immediately allow for seeking Her guidance. Such experiences provide a glimpse into the mystical communication that goes on to this day and deeply impress upon observers the importance of adhering to dharma as well as placing God in the center of our life.

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Correction

In "The Reality of Animal Sacrifice" (Apr/May/Jun 2012), the word *not was* unintentionally omitted in Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar's statement that the Vedic verses mentioning animal sacrifice should not be interpreted literally.

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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107 Kaholale Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of *HINDUISM TODAY*.

Blending Spirituality with Activism

How you can help enlist great souls for a great cause

In 2003, MIHIR MEGHANI AND A BAND of dynamic young Hindus decided the time had come. "The problem was evident and the solution clear," explains Mihir, who was born in Philadelphia in 1972. "American Hindus needed a strong, credible and effective voice—one that makers of public opinion and policy would hear and respect." To that end, the young visionaries founded the Hindu American Foundation (HAF). Today, ten years on, HAF has established itself well, championed several Hindu causes and accomplished its mission of becoming a powerful Hindu voice.

"HINDUISM TODAY has facilitated much of our work," explains Mihir, "mostly by creating respect for Hinduism. Its grasp of contemporary issues and knack for sharing Hindu knowledge and wisdom in clear, modern language have given us tools to work with. And the magazine's monastic

staff is a model for us, one of spirituality blended with activism. They don't just retreat, they're ever finding new ways to serve and uplift everyone, sharing the fruit of their meditations. That is a powerful message in itself that we use and build on."

Mihir and his wife Tanvi live in Fremont, California. He is a physician and she is a jewelry designer. They have given generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "We want to see that day come when the magazine expands, is translated into hundreds of languages, impacts millions and enlists ever more brilliant souls as workers for this great Hindu renaissance."

If you share Dr. and Mrs. Meghani's vision and enthusiasm for our common cause and the magazine's future, please donate—now or in your estate plan—to the Hinduism Today Production Fund at:



Dr. and Mrs. Meghani: "Hinduism Today provides the quality information that Hindus need, as a pure gift, without ego or axes to grind. This is inspiring to people who have similar aspirations."

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QUOTES & QUIPS

For those who have strong dedication, samadhi is near.

Patanjali (2ND century BCE), Indian author of the *Yoga Sutras*

During the Kali Yuga, man, being completely dependent on food to live life, cannot altogether shake off the idea that he is the body. But truly he is Brahman.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886), Indian mystic

Hasten slowly, and you shall soon arrive. Renounce all worldly goals, and you shall reach the highest goal. **Milarepa** (c.1052–1135), Tibet's most revered yogi

Everyone wishes to be loved. Only a blessed few wish to love. **Dada Vaswani**, leader of the *Sadhu Vaswani Mission*

Awareness is ever there. It need not be realized. Open the shutter of the mind, and it will be flooded with light. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981), Hindu sage

DID YOU KNOW?

Soma, the Rishis' Potion

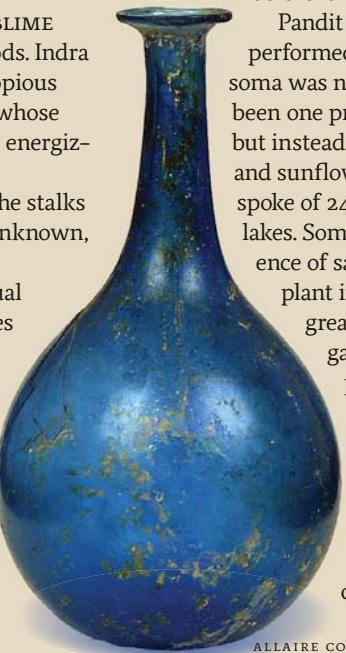
SOMA WAS A DRINK OF RITUAL IMPORTANCE, A SUBLIME mixture capable of transforming mortals into Gods. Indra and Agni are portrayed as consuming soma in copious quantities. It is frequently mentioned in the *Rig Veda*, whose *Soma Mandala* contains 114 hymns, many praising its energizing qualities.

It is described as prepared by extracting juice from the stalks of a certain plant—unfortunately, which one is today unknown, a secret lost to the ages.

Drinking soma was a restricted, yet documented ritual at the time the Vedas were being written. Its properties seem to have been stimulating of the sage's inner faculties, who, with their yogic powers, were able to soar in consciousness into the realms of the Gods.

Today, without the formula, modern Hindu rituals offer expiatory prayers apologizing for the use of a substitute plant because soma has become unavailable.

There has been much speculation concerning what is most likely to have been the identity of the original plant. There is no solid consensus. It is



ALLAIRE COLLECTION

All know that the drop merges into the ocean, but few know that the ocean merges into the drop. **Kabir** (1440–1518), Indian Saint

Bhakti is nothing but the devotion we show to the divinity that resides within us. Once we regard the divinity within us with devotional fervor, we are bound to develop the same affection towards everything outside, for the same divine truth runs through all things. **M.S. Subbulakshmi** (1916–2004), renowned Carnatic singer

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children. **Nelson Mandela**, president of South Africa and Nobel laureate

There is no physical world for me. All I see,

I see it as the glorious manifestation of the Almighty. **Swami Sivananda** (1887–1963), founder of the Divine Life Society

There is nothing either good or bad, thinking makes it so. **William Shakespeare** (1564–1616), English playwright

Laughter is a spark from the soul.

My friend has kleptomania, but when it gets bad, he takes something for it.

All the elements in your body, apart from hydrogen, helium and lithium, came from stars that once exploded. Forget Jesus: a whole star had to die for you to live. **Lawrence Krauss**, American physicist and cosmologist

described as "green-tinted" and "bright-shining" in the *Rig Veda*. One recipe states that soma juice was filtered through lamb's wool, and mixed with other ingredients (including cow milk) before it was drunk. It was said to "roar."

Pandit Vamadeva Shastri, a modern scholar who has performed extensive research, holds a view that the soma was not simply one plant (though there may have been one primary soma plant in certain times and places), but instead several families of plants, including orchids and sunflower. The great early Ayurvedic doctor, Sushrut, spoke of 24 soma plants, growing mainly on Himalayan lakes. Soma, therefore, was likely part of an entire science of sacred plant preparations and not just one plant in particular. The *Atharva Veda* mentions five great plants of which soma is the best, including ganja, barley and darbha, showing that many plants had soma-like qualities.

Vamadeva believes that real soma is a secretion in the brain from spiritual practices of yoga, pranayama, mantra and meditation, releasing a flood of bliss throughout the body. This inner soma is the main subject of the Vedic hymns, though outer somas were once also important.

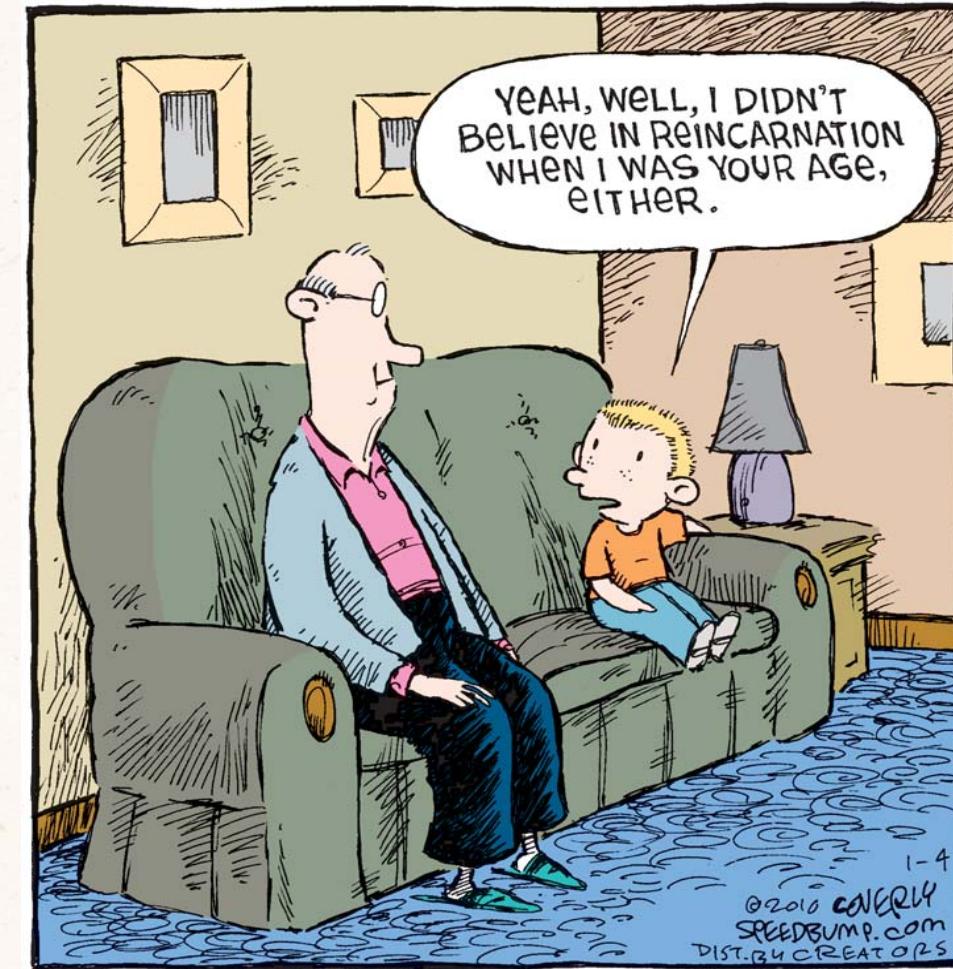
Love is wise. Hatred is foolish.
Bertrand Russel (1872–1970), British philosopher, logician and historian

Photons have mass?
I didn't even know they were Catholic!

God's omnipresent consciousness exists within each individual. Imagine a japa mala: every person is a bead, but the string that goes through the center of each bead—God's consciousness—permeates us all. By looking deeply inside ourselves, we can experience our oneness with God. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

If an earthquake does you harm, do you try to harm it in return? Just keep quiet. Let everyone mind their own business. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872–1964), Sri Lankan mystic

Hindus profoundly know that God is the same Supreme Being in whom peoples of all faiths find solace, peace and liberation. Nonetheless, we realize that all religions are not the same, and the doctrines of one often conflict with those of another. Even this should never be cause for religious tension or intolerance. **Satguru Siva Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001)



BASICS OF HINDUISM

Our Subtle Anatomy

THOUGH WE EMPHASIZE THAT WHICH WE CAN SEE, SMELL, hear, taste and touch, there is much more to existence, refined levels which rishis and yogis have described in detail. Humans themselves are far more interesting than the physical body which is discarded after each life.

The innermost core of each person is the imperishable atman, one's Self, which is to God as a spark is to the fire. In order for the atman or soul to function in the various planes of existence, it creates vessels, containers, constructs of energy ranging from the most refined to the most gross form—physical matter itself—which are then inhabited by the divine atman. These are called *koshas*.

Hindu sages have spoken about five *koshas*. They are the *annamaya kosha*, "sheath composed of food," the physical body. In it we function in daily life and, if our consciousness is still unevolved, it will be with this vessel that we will identify, thinking that we

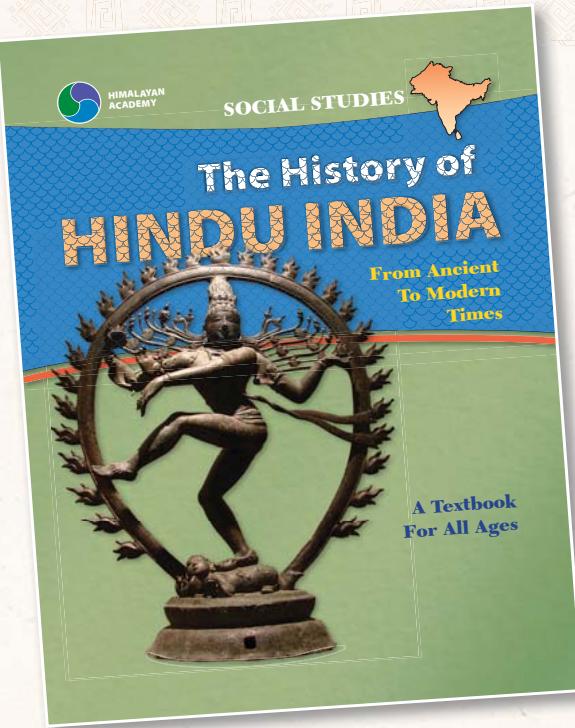
are nothing but matter. In ascending order of subtlety comes the *pranamaya kosha*, "sheath of prana," also known as the pranic or etheric body; and after that the *manomaya kosha*, "wish-formed sheath," the lower astral body, the instinctive-intellectual sheath of ordinary thought, desire and emotion. Higher still lies the *vijnanamaya kosha*, "sheath of cognition;" the mental or cognitive-intuitive vessel.

Above them all resides the subtlest of vehicles, the *anandamaya kosha*, "body of bliss." This is the intuitive super-conscious sheath, or actinic-causal body. Anandamaya kosha is not a sheath in the same sense as the four outer koshas. It is the soul itself, a body of light, also called *karana sharira*, "causal body," and *karmashaya*, "holder of karmas" of this and all past lives. It is the anandamaya kosha which evolves through all incarnations and beyond until the soul's ultimate, fulfilled merger, *vishvagrasta*, in the Primal Soul, Parameshvara. Then anandamaya kosha becomes Sivamayakosha, the body of God Siva.

This knowledge is liberating for Hindus, who know that what others call death is nothing but the temporary shedding of the outermost of one's layers, the "sheath composed of food."



A. MANIVEL



Finally, a Fair & Accurate Presentation of Hindu History for Children

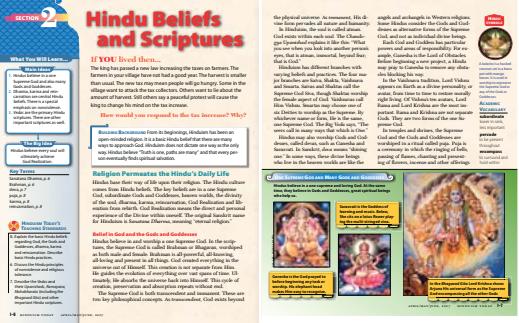
A 128-page sixth-grade social studies course from the editors of HINDUISM TODAY

HINDUISM TODAY's Hindu history book is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. If each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Shiva G. Bajpai, Professor Emeritus, California State University Northridge

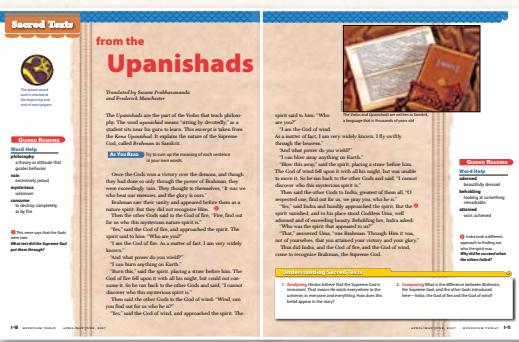
While no book can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that this work compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

Hindu American Foundation, USA



This presentation provides a needed counterbalance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus. Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending it as review material for my college students.

Jeffery D. Long, Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA



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FROM THE AGAMAS

Evolution Beyond Embodied Existence

Plus understanding the nature of anava, our limiting sense of ego

The following two texts are lucid translations of verses 49 to 60 and verses 137 to 147 of Chapter Four of Paushkara Agama, "On the Nature of the Bound Soul." In the first set of verses Siva explains to the sages the evolution of the soul in the higher realms of existence after its liberation from rebirth on this plane. In the second He explains the nature of the primal veiling darkness, anava mala.

On the Continued Evolution of Mature Souls

AT THE OUTSET, SIVA, BY HIS OWN WILL, BESTOWS HIS GRACE ON the competent liberated souls and installs some of them, in consideration of their evolution, in an exalted "authority-wielding" state related to the highest realm, Siva tattva. He installs them in this state, having made their power of knowing and of doing to be fully unfolded and to have unobstructed brilliance. He installs some others who are omniscient and omnipotent in the planes, or tattvas, immediately below Siva tattva—Sadasiva or Bhoga, Ishvara and Vidya. All of these liberated souls are the knowers of all and possess great vigor and strength.

Those who have reached Bhoga tattva become endowed with all the qualities of Sadasiva. They experience multitudinous enjoyments as desired by them. As willed by Lord Siva, they become very active in performing all the functions of the Lord. Those who have reached Ishvara tattva are specially endowed with strong control over their cognitive power in view of their works concerned with Ishvara tattva. They become endowed with the qualities of Ishvara, who presides over the Ishvara tattva. They evolve into the most superior lords in wielding their power in the regions pertaining to them.

Among those who have reached Ishvara tattva, eight predominate: Ananteshvara, Sukshma and others. Of these, each preceding one possesses one attribute more than the succeeding one. They are with great beauty and charm, with their mind ever kept in an unconstrained state. Those who have reached the Vidya tattva are known as Vidyas (mantras). They are seventy million in number. All of them are great evolved souls with exceeding brilliance.

Eventually non-attachment arises in the mind of one of these Vidyas as the question "What use and significance is this authoritative state which is opposed to the beatific and blissful state? Enough with these activities." He is then favored by Lord Siva. Duly considering his highly mature state, the Supreme Lord bestows His grace upon him through His compassionate look, which itself is capable of granting the ultimate liberation. Then the all-pervasive Supreme Lord bestows his grace upon the next Vidya who is in the nearest state of getting liberation and installs him in the exalted state occupied previously by the Vidya who has now attained final liberation. Consequently, the Lord lifts up another Vidya who is competent enough and installs him in the higher state occupied so far by the preceding Vidya.

On the Nature of Anava Mala (Sense of Ego)

IT SHOULD BE KNOWN THAT ANAVA MALA IS SEVENFOLD—MOHA, mada, raga, vishada, tapa, sasha and vaichitrya. These seven effects of mala are found to be in their full play in all those persons who are shrouded by the bondage of mala.



Higher realms: The various beings of the higher worlds are souls whose evolution has brought them to that state of existence

The mala known as *moha* [heavy delusion] is connate to the souls. Being a primal impurity, it serves as the cause of all six other impurities. Due to its existence, there occurs delusion in respect of women and worldly things, even for those who know what is to be abandoned and what is to be pursued.

That because of which a person praises even the woman already obtained, saying "There is no one equal to her, she is such a beautiful woman," is called *mada* [insatiable desire]. Ever increasing insatiable desire is called *raga*. On the disappearance or on the death of the already obtained woman there occurs great despair to him, making his eyes fill with tears. Such occurrence of grief is due to the mala called *vishada* which affects all the embodied souls. Thence arises excessive lamentation which occurs due to the mala known as *tapa* [being scorched by attachment]. Consequently there arises a stupefied and paralyzed state due to the mala known as *sasha*, which is very difficult to overcome.

Vaichitrya mala produces diverse conceited thoughts, such as, "This is my relative, this is my wife, these wealth and lands are plentiful and therefore I am the one who has fully achieved his goal;" or "Who is there who could protect my family?" All these together are called the co-born malas, seven in number, and are present in those who are shrouded by anava mala.

The experience of time and other categories of existence (tattva) occurs to the soul due to the existence of anava mala. Once present, these seven impurities—*moha*, and others—proceed to bind the souls. These seven co-originate with the souls which are shrouded by anava mala.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastra*s. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Paushkara Agama*.



One Thousand Years of Service

SPECIAL FEATURE

A Festive Look at Karnataka's Bastion of Vira Saivism

SURROUNDED BY VAST FIELDS OF RICE, A SMALL village in Karnataka is home to one of Saivism's most dynamic monasteries. It was here, long ago, that a saint founded a lineage dedicated to bringing peace and succor to the people; and it is from here, today, that a guru leads this massive organization. Grounded

in the teachings of Basavanna, a fiery reformer and superb poet, Suttur Math has stood the test of time and fulfilled its dharma as the protector of the needy. Shaped by a venerable past and looking into the future, this enterprising Vira Saiva monastery embraces the new in preparation for its next thousand years.



The Founder's Festival

WITH CHOODIE SHIVARAM, SUTTUR DI JAGADGURU SRI SHIVARATHREEswara Mahaswami ki *jai!*—the

A crowd roars with deafening enthusiasm, chanting the name of Suttur Math's founder. Over and over, this saint's name will be intoned, praised, revered and sung with entrancing repetition, as loudly as his devotees are able, during this annual six-day festival honoring his birthday. It has been happening this way for over a thousand years.

Suttur, one of the oldest maths (monasteries) in South India, is based in its eponymous village, a delightful but usually sleepy outpost in the Karnataka countryside about 17.4 miles from Mysore. It is an area where farmers, anticipating the blessings of the monsoon rains, work the vast acreage of paddy fields, their plows pulled by dutiful bovines whose colorfully painted horns contrast brightly with the dry earth. Here the gentle ways of old India are still the norm, where the serenity of country life grants immunity to the hustle of modern times. Most of the year, the peaceful charm of this tiny community conceals the scope and magnitude of Suttur Math's activities. But for one week each January, a sea of almost a million fervent devotees arrive to celebrate the founder's birthday.

The editors of HINDUISM TODAY arrive on January 19, 2012, on the first day of the festival, with staff reporter Choodie Shivaram of Bengaluru and her husband Nagendra.

Welcomed by musicians, local swamis and devotees, acrobats, dancers and the occasional elephants, we soon begin to appreciate the scope and scale of the traditional Suttur Jathra and understand why people travel long distances to attend.

A gathering of this magnitude attracts people from all over the state and beyond. Though India's booming cities get all the press about the country's potential, two thirds of the population still live in the countryside. For farmers and villagers, the *jathra* (festival) is an opportunity to put on your best clothes, take a break from usual duties, attend a masterfully organized event for free and, on top of it all, get some blessings—for religion is intrinsically woven into each activity. Culture blends inseparably with art and faith. For those who have little opportunity for entertainment or recreation, every village fair is a social must, an eagerly awaited celebration, and the *jathra* is entertainment unlimited.

Not only villagers are here. Also joining in and paying their respects are state and national ministers, administrators and politicians, business tycoons, film stars, musicians—the rich, powerful and influential from all walks of life. Many are former students of one of the many educational institutions under the umbrella of Suttur Math, people who have attained a high position in their career and welcome the opportunity to return and offer support to JSS. (The acronym JSS, for Jagadguru Sri Shivarathreeswara, refers to the entire organization—Suttur Math and all its branches—and those three letters mean a lot in Karnataka and South India.)

The spectrum of festivities is over-

whelming, with activities taking place simultaneously. Certain events recur several times each day, such as the pujas, abhishekams and small parades honoring Adi Jagadguru and the most recent gurus of the Math. The one-time events are bewildering in number and variety: the *rathotsava* (car festival), the rangoli competition, a religious meet, a bhajana mela with the best singers in the state, the Karnataka Vaibhava sound-and-light evening show, agricultural conferences to share information and technology pertinent to farming, a seminar on managing natural resources, a wrestling competition, the cattle show with hundreds of well-groomed bovines, an art and drawing contest for children, the sports meet, cultural shows, quiz competitions, a *theppotsava* (boat parade) for Adi Jagadguru, mass marriages for hundreds of couples and an hour-long, breathtaking fireworks display which stuns our editors and could be seen from miles away.

Attending is good for business, too. Healthy cows and bulls are sold and purchased in large numbers. A cow is a wonderful life-giving asset for country dwellers, providing strength in the fields, milk for food, and blessings for the home. Here at the *jathra*, the best are sold at lively auctions.

Even in the midst of all this activity, one never feels hurried or uncomfortably hustled as in a big city. Although these events evoke fervor and the human mass is often tightly packed, there is a pervasive sense of small-town courtesy, a natural, flowing pace that harmonizes the chaos. We see no one running or quarreling. The only cars are those of the organization; this is a festival where most



people attend barefoot.

Events like the Jathra Mahotsava help preserve our traditions and cultural identity and foster participation, the sense of belonging to the vast, ancient and vibrantly alive Sanatana Dharma. If one wants to immerse oneself in the landscape of Indian culture and the traditional arts of Karnataka, the annual Jathra Mahotsava at Suttur is the perfect opportunity. Culture, here, is not an aloof intellectual concept, but a pulsating, vibrant way of celebrating. Even before you enter Suttur, the festive excitement fills the air. The countless souls who attend exude a positive sense of

pride in their heritage. Above all else, this is a religious celebration, a gathering of faith. At the center of it all is the guru, Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswami, a brilliant manager whose incredibly meticulous instructions keep every detail under complete control.

Parading Adi Jagadguru

Fireworks explode in the sky with a deafening boom just before the auspicious yatra parading the murti of the founder down the streets. A flock of gigantic birds circle above us, disoriented by the bone-rattling noise. But no—those are bats, enormous black bats,

awe-worthy and creepy. As the hapless confused animals flee the area, we are reminded that loud fireworks are used in many cultures to scare away evil spirits, demons of mischief and darkness—and perhaps a few innocent bats, to symbolize the fleeing forces of ignorant evil.

The way thus cleared for the saint's parade, we are asked to be among the first group to tug on the giant ropes. We take our turn then soon yield to stalwart devotees who pull the utsava murti through the streets, stopping at temples and entering nearby villages. The giant car would return 10 hours later, having given darshan everyone in the neighborhood. The joyful crowd's frenzied chanting expresses an outpouring of devotion. Our kindly hosts take care that we are at their side every moment, safe from trampling.

Following the murti is a grand parade with dozens of floats, each based on a spiritual theme, enacting a story or showcasing a precept. The amateur actors on the brightly colored floats, mostly children, are gorgeous in their meticulously prepared costumes and makeup. The colors of the floats and costumes are vivid in the sun. A bull passes by decorated with money and a rudraksha halter, similar to Basava, the sacred bull featured in an article in the April/May/June 2009 issue of HINDUISM TODAY. The event goes on and on, with amazing performances of popular dancers, acrobats, fire-eaters, nadawara players, drummers and anyone else capable of making noise. New York's Labor Day parade? Venice's carnival? Rio? No, Suttur is much more cool.

The annual celebration honoring Suttur Math's founder

is a magnificent and well-organized festival attended by thousands of joyous devotees



(Clockwise from top right) The entrance to Adi Jagadguru's temple is visible behind the chariot parading his murti amidst an ocean of devotees; the Viragase Kunitha, dancers and performers representing the fierce warriors of Lord Siva and the deva Virabhadra, entertain the crowd during the festival; artists ride mock horses with graceful moves and colorful regalia; acrobats start what will become a six-level human pyramid, with drummers setting the pace for a thrilling event





Food and Lodging

Organizing such a festival is a mammoth effort. Over ten thousand volunteers, mostly teachers and students of the math's institutions, are engaged in the smooth conduct of the jathra to ensure that all basic needs are met. Camps provide ample space for devotees to sleep, keep their belongings and bathe, while three meals each day are provided to all, free of charge.

The mass feeding, or *daasoha*, is one of the most impressive features of this festival. It is a core demonstration of the Lingayat tradition, in which service to all is one of the highest tenets. We ask to see the kitchens that feed the 250,000 pilgrims who are present at any one moment in the jathra. (The total

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count of those who visit during the week-long event is estimated at over a million.) We expect a building—how naive of us! The "kitchen," a two-acre complex, is a roofed but open-air structure where six-foot-high mounds of colorful, fresh vegetables are being chopped, diced, minced, cut and prepared in bucketloads by dozens of volunteers and workers.

We walk a long row of unbelievably huge 800-gallon vats; these are heated over burning wood, day and night, to cook three meals a day for each pilgrim. As the cooks work, the vats, filled with sambar and other delights, make for a tantalizing mix of smells and colors.

In one corner, protected from the wind by straw walls, a large room stores tons of fully

cooked rice. This is moved from pile to pile by strong men with big shovels. It is easier and more efficient to prepare the rice in advance, we are told. An ingenious, inexpensive system allows it to be stored, without spoiling, for a day or more: the cooked rice is laid on a bed of straw, which provides just the right amount of ventilation to keep its moisture level low.

Entering a large building, we walk past thousands of 80lb. rice sacks, hundreds of cases of ghee and great piles of aromatic spices. All these provisions have been donated in bulk by generous devotees.

The entire operation is run with precision and efficiency, from the cooking to the serving of food, with no chaos, no rush and no complaints.

The jathra feeds tens of thousands for free, every day



ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY JSS



Exciting Performances

The third day of the festival begins with a flag-raising ceremony—just a small, inconsequential affair, if you can manage to disregard a few trifling details such as the twenty nadaswara players, the five acrobats doing bicycle stunts, the five actors dressed up as warriors with play swords, the eight female drummers, the countless male drummers, the security officers mounted on horses, the ocean of people attending and, of course, the elephant.

The streets reverberate to the drums accompanying the veeragase, a highly spirited, folk dance. Viragase Kunitha dancers representing Siva's ganas, their heads adorned in plumed crowns, wield sword and shield, dancing with regal ferocity.

There is so much to see, learn and do. Along the roadside are over 500 stalls, ranging from arts, crafts and clothes to renowned scientific organizations. Families can buy tasty foods, gadgets and even some home essentials. As the sun sets after a long and exciting day, the crowds gravitate to all-night plays based on Hindu epics, any sleepiness kept at bay by the entralling and sometimes humorous storylines, and the stamina of the actors.

The worldly film music that dominates many other festivals is conspicuously absent; here the traditional Indian musical offerings rule. No incongruous sounds or lyrics detract from the street shows of native acrobats, traditional dances and folk song competitions that showcase, preserve and propagate the rare and ancient skills and music.

Firewalk

As night darkens the paddy fields, the HINDUISM TODAY team are escorted to the night's big event, a firewalk. Off we drive through a throng of people—think of a crowd walking shoulder to shoulder down an eight-lane freeway—all heading for the firepit.

We park nearby. Our host takes our hand and we follow on his heels as he deftly opens a portal in the wall of bodies. We find ourselves at the pit's exit, our cheeks baking, just 20 feet from the coals which have been burning since ten in the morning. Ten men are tending the pit, flattening the coals with long iron shovels and fanning them to a still fiercer heat.

HINDUISM TODAY



As the workers clean off their shovels, hissing clouds of steam testify to the coals' heat.

Drummers are beating their instruments, creating a hypnotic rhythm. Viragase Kunitha performers dance in their warrior garb, frenzied, shouting, spinning. A man approaches in trance, his eyes wide and absent, guided by several others—he is to be the first across the coals. Another man comes, with a pink cloth on his head, holding a water pot. He, too, is in a trance, barely of this world, aided by a team that hold him up and keep his direction. He is to walk second. A brief puja is performed, and we all throw flowers into the pit. Drums roll, crowds cry for action and the dancers ready themselves. The firewalkers run! Two remain serene, though most grimace with pain. In less than a single minute it is done, and done well. They came

Mass Marriage

The next morning features a mass wedding. Some 250 couples and their extended families are assembled under a giant tent pavilion. For the poor, such an event is a great boon. A proper religious wedding, with at least some appropriate garb and celebration, is a social requirement before a couple forms their own family; but the expenses of an individual wedding ceremony, if even remotely possible, could bankrupt the family. Without the help of organizations like Suttur Math to organize mass marriages, poverty can postpone

a marriage far too long, leading to stress or even infidelity of groom or bride. If healthy families are the fabric which create a wholesome community, marriage is the essential thread.

As in the other events of this six-day festival, the list of dignitaries arriving to preside over the mass wedding is impressive, testimony to the tremendous influence and respect so well earned by Suttur Math. Ministers and politicians vie to sit near the current guru of the Math, Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswami, a well-beloved saint, hoping perhaps to obtain some of the goodwill that the locals feel toward the guru and JSS. Many speeches are given at the beginning of each event.

But it is the spiritual leaders, not the politicians, that attract the devotion and attention of the people. Swamis and pandits have come from near and far, and many of them run their own mammoth institutions. The names are impressive, a long list including Sri Shivalingendra Swamiji, Sri Yatheeswara Shivacharya, Sri Chidananda Swamiji of Mysore, Sri Rudramuni Swamiji of Tiptur and many other luminaries of the Hindu Renaissance, such as the Hindu of the Year for 2008, Dr. Sri Balagangadhara Mahaswamiji. The display of devotion is overwhelming: people flock in droves to respectfully touch the feet of these holy men, regardless of theological differences. Only the presence of security staff allows the swamis to reach the stage.

The marriages are performed by pandits

(clockwise from top) A float at Adi Jagadguru's parade; brides ready for a mass marriage; red hot coals are prepared for firewalking rites; piles of fresh vegetables; a room full of cooked rice; in the vast kitchen, many men are needed to handle each curry; wrestling is a popular sport at the jathra





in the Vedic style, with the blessings of Sri Shivarathri Mahaswami. True to the philosophy of Lingayatism, each union is blessed irrespective of caste or social standing. All aspects of the wedding are taken care of to ensure that the couples don't have to spend money on an expensive extravaganza.

Education

The Suttur jathra is about much more than entertainment. The huge crowds, consisting largely of village folk and farmers, provide an ideal opportunity for mass education, and Suttur Math helps provide training that is otherwise unavailable to most of these people. Experts from all fields have been invited, and educational sessions have been carefully organized for farmers, women and children. The opportunities are inspirational for young and old alike.

In cities, a similar adult education event usually finds almost no audience, even when people are specially invited and goaded to come; but at the Suttur jathra, even esoteric discussions receive active participation from villagers. They listen, participate, understand and immerse themselves in the sessions.

An agricultural exhibition showcases the latest in farming technology and methods, promoting new crops and a pricing index for produce, even while explaining the importance of preserving traditional farming. Over 70 agricultural experts conduct lectures and workshops for farmers on the most effective methods of farming. Also offered are ses-

sions on animal husbandry, health care and other vocational activities.

India's premier space organization showcases its programs with models of spacecraft, and its researchers explain the value of science to eager young minds. Other educational stalls share specialized knowledge: India's leading defense research organizations, food labs, technology organizations, manufacturers of cutting-edge machinery, medical research organizations and hospitals. Students of JSS schools and institutions confidently display their talent through science and social studies projects. The jathra also acts as a lightning rod for spiritual discussion and activities among hundreds of Lingayat monks, saints and religious leaders. Here spiritual leaders from different faiths and sects are participating in an all-faith meet, a colloquy on religion and spirituality like those which have shaped Hinduism through time immemorial. The varied theological viewpoints are not regarded as any sort of barrier: unity in diversity is the resounding motto.

The Guru at the Center

At the heart of everything that Suttur Math does is the guru, heir to a thousand-year-old tradition of selfless service. He embodies and manifests the spiritual power of this long and venerated lineage. His life is dedicated to Siva, following the precepts of Adi Jagadguru, the founder of Suttur Math, and Saint Basavanna, the foremost expounder of Lingayat Saivism. Beyond doubt, he is the most pop-

ular attraction of this gigantic convention. Hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of people flock to see him and touch his feet, asking for blessings. Ten hours a day and more, throughout the whole jathra, Swami untiringly sits on a simple chair on a porch near the temple, graciously giving darshan and blessing his devotees. A human tide comes to prostrate, never abating, ceaseless as waves against a seaside cliff. They are men, women and children of all walks of life, some wealthy and influential, some poor and humble. There are those who touch Swami's feet with respectful detachment, perhaps with a tinge of religious doubt. Others cling to his feet as if they were the mast in a storm, their pathway to salvation, asking for blessings they need not voice. In their shining faces, in their deep eyes, we see devotion and love, we see gratitude. Smiles abound, often showing more than one missing tooth.

The message is clear: because of the guru of Suttur Math, they are closer to God. And in the eyes of Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswami, a true Lingayat leader, these humble people are God Siva Himself.

As the event winds down with a stunning display of fireworks lasting more than one hour, with the serene waters of the Kapila River reflecting the illuminated boat-shrine for Adi Jagadguru, one can only think how fortunate it is that such a great yogi, one day long ago, initiated the spark that created all the wonders we see.



ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY JSS

Art uplifts the spirit, and some of the best artists in India come to Suttur for the jathra



(clockwise from above) Sri Shivarathri Mahaswami, head of Suttur Math, has every detail under control; a murti of Adi Jagadguru floats on the Kapila River during a fireworks show; confident and talented village women display their skills at the kolam-drawing contest; world-class musicians enliven the jathra





Lingayats and the History of Suttur Math

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, SUTTUR

THE VERY EXISTENCE OF SUTTUR MATH is due to its strategic location at the border between two great ancient kingdoms. A millennium ago, the region was mired in conflict between the powerful Ganga and Chola dynasties. Their armies were massing for battle. The Chola king had ridden out to inspect his troops, when suddenly his horse stopped short at a hill called Siddhara Betta. Despite the monarch's urgings, it refused to go further. Intrigued by the steed's strange behavior, the king explored and found a tapasvi (a yogi performing austerities) meditating in a cave. The sight of the yogi provoked a deep experience in the Chola monarch, who heard inwardly the divine sound of Pranava Aum.

Learning about the impending strife, the saint met with the warring kings and convinced them of the futility of battle, the transience of victory, the brevity of human existence and the higher purpose of life. He thereby brought about a peace accord, and the opposing monarchs did not clash.

Seeking a stable peace, both kings requested that the mendicant saint stay in Suttur. In order to inspire the yogi to not wander away, the Chola king built a small Siva temple, which still stands today. (This temple was renovated in 1988 by Ganapati Sthapati, the same master architect who designed Iraivan Temple in Hawaii).

The devotion of both the Cholas and Ganas led to the founding of Suttur Math. Soon, surrounding kingdoms also came under the

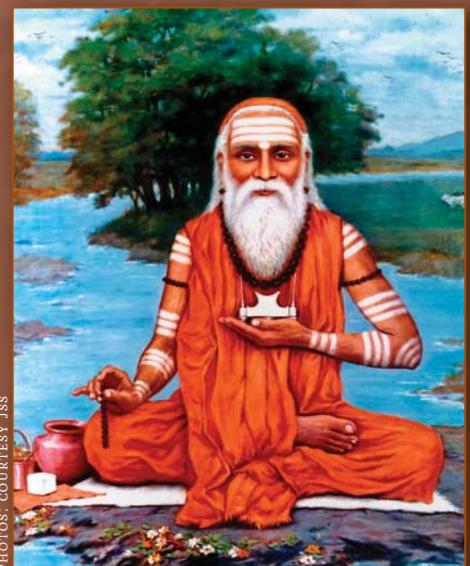
guru's influence, and their kings became his disciples and generous patrons to the math. "There are inscriptions citing these incidents. The birth of Suttur Math is well documented," says octogenarian Gangadharan, a prominent Lingayat and devotee of Suttur Math.

Even the name "Suttur" is tied to the saint and the king's horse. One day the Chola king was preparing to visit his capital at Kanchi. He requested the saint to not leave; but on his return, he was distressed because he could not find the sage. Once more, his steed was more perceptive. The horse jumped into the Kapila river, which was in spate, and performed three pradakshinas (circumambulations) of a particular spot. Investigating, the king found the sage there in deep meditation amid the turbulent waters. Thus was the village given its present name: in the local Kannada language, *suttu* means circumambulation and *ooru* means place. The original name has long since been forgotten.

This great yogi was none other than Adi Jagadguru Shivarathreeswara Swamiji. Like many wandering monks, he had stopped temporarily in a peaceful spot to perform penance. It is no wonder he had not wished his meditations disturbed by the territorial wars of two great empires!

Having created a stronghold of peace and devotion to God, and longing for complete union with Lord Siva, Adi Jagadguru was determined to relinquish his worldly responsibilities and return to his meditations. As his successor he nominated Sri Eshaneswara Wodeyar, a scholar from Kashi, initiating the

Vira Saivism was reformed by Basavanna and kept alive by dedicated saints



PHOTOS: COURTESY: SS

(left to right) A painting illustrates Adi Jagadguru Shivarathreeswara holding a Sivalinga, in the river; Jagadguru Sri Shivarathri Rajendra Mahaswamigal, the preceptor of the current guru; an 11th-century stone found in the area displays a Sivalinga illustration

lineage that continues to this day.

In line with its Vira Saiva philosophy, service to the needy was central to the activities of the math. The young organization began to provide shelter and food to travelers, especially those who were traveling to temple fairs, and Suttur Math soon became popular among pilgrims from far and wide. The Someshwara temple nearby is said to have been constructed by the Chola kings in accordance with the wishes of Sri Eshaneswara. This event is recorded in a stone inscription dated October 23, 1032.

Lineage

Suttur Math follows the *virakta* method of succession, in which the next guru is chosen from among the family members of the current guru, those descended from a sibling or another close relative. This differs from the more common sannyasa succession, *pattada*, in which a guru chooses one of his monastic disciples as his successor or a brahmachari from the community. The third guru of Suttur Math was a relative of the second guru, Eshaneswara Swamiji. This appointment established Suttur's unbroken tradition of familial succession.

According to custom, the guru gives *diksha*, or initiation, to his successor when he feels the time is appropriate. The disciple's head is shaved and the senior guru performs abhishekam (ritual ablution) to him; then a document of nomination is inscribed on silver foil and tied to his forehead. In the presence of a huge assemblage of monks from other maths, seniors and devotees, the junior guru ascends the spiritual throne and (in most recent decades) is adorned with a

diamond-studded crown. Renowned guests and heads of various maths sign a document declaring his nomination as successor, and he is then taken in procession around the town.

At Suttur, a successor is identified early on and announced to the community; there is no secrecy. He is trained systematically and takes over when the senior feels the time is appropriate. If the guru dies without nominating a successor, the elders and other senior gurus nominate a successor and give him *diksha*.

It is a challenge to ensure that external influences do not affect the personality of the successor, since he lives in a non-monastic world in his early years, attending school and college before formally ascending his spiritual position. To counter worldly influences, the guru maintains a close influence on the

nominee, engaging him closely in the math's activities and programs. The 22nd guru of Suttur, Sri Mantra Maharishi, nominated his successor, Rajendra, when the boy was six months old. He kept the youth under his watchful gaze at all times.

Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswami, the present guru, earned a masters degree from Karnatak University. He became the leader of the spiritual lineage in 1986, when he was 29 years old, after the passing of his uncle, Sri Rajendra Swamigal.

Philosophy

Suttur is a Vira Saiva monastery-temple complex following an ancient line of theology that was greatly redefined and reinvigorated by Basava, a 12th-century saint.

Vira Saivism's chief philosophical principle, Shakti Vishishtadvaita, accepts both difference and non-difference between soul and God. Like the sun and its rays, Siva and the cosmic force are one; yet Siva is beyond His creation. God is both efficient and material cause, and His creation is real, not illusory.

Great spiritual leaders teach compassion and respect for others in ways that often result in social change. In the South Indian state of Karnataka, these efforts were spearheaded by the revolutionary and often radical life of Basava, also known as Basava Anna (elder brother Basava) or Basavanna. Ferociously opposed to all social barriers to God realization, he urged people to seek oneness with Siva and treat all other men and women as equals.

A Guru's Amazing Rites of Worship

THE ROOM IS WHITE, ITS WALLS AND FLOORS SMOOTH MARBLE. IN one corner sits a quiet swami, a devoted man who dedicates his life to serving Siva and helping thousands. In front of him is a small table with dozens of precious utensils of gleaming silver and a tray of flowers; on his right, a tiny statue of Adi Jagadguru, the founder of his lineage; on his left, three priests are chanting. The sound of prayers and mantras is full and melodious, reverberating in the small room. A few guests are attending his daily private worship. The sun has not yet risen.

Methodically, Sri Shivarathri Deshikendra Mahaswami offers flowers to Adi Jagadguru, arranging the offerings around the murti with deft perfection. Monks of all ages come and go continuously, helping him light camphor, fill ghee lamps and remove trays. Not a word is spoken; Swami waves his fingers subtly, gestures with his eyes and whatever he needs is supplied by his well-trained disciples. No flower petal remains on the floor, no spilled drop goes unattended.

From a large silver pendant hanging from his neck he produces a round, black Sivalinga, the form of formless God. It is a sight to behold, a personal artifact rarely exposed to outsiders.

With evident joy, he handles the stone as his personal temple, as a precious treasure, as God. He pours water on it from a silver container. Then, drawing from a tray with dozens of minuscule pots filled with myriad substances, he pours liquids on the stone, one by one, then rinses it, anointing the artifact with vibhuti after each ablution. The chanting has never stopped. When the priests' voices lose luster, Swami spurs them on with his strong, booming voice.

Throughout the puja, he holds the Linga on his outstretched left palm. He makes offerings with his right hand, now and again concealing it under a simple cloth embroidered with arcane symbols, while twisting his fingers in mystic mudras which are *rahasya*—secret.

A few monks come and prostrate, open their own sacred capsules, and sit in a semi-circle beside their guru, holding their Sivalingas under swami's hand, one underneath the other. As liquid that is poured over the guru's personal Sivalinga, it cascades down, bathing in succession all of their Lingas. The monks take turns, allowing others to also come and receive the grace. Swami holds his Sivalinga on his hand for a long time as his shishyas come and go, his seemingly untiring arm steady, strengthened by years of daily ritual. With the fingers of his right hand he holds a specially shaped silver vessel with an orifice at the bottom, from which water slowly bathes the stone.

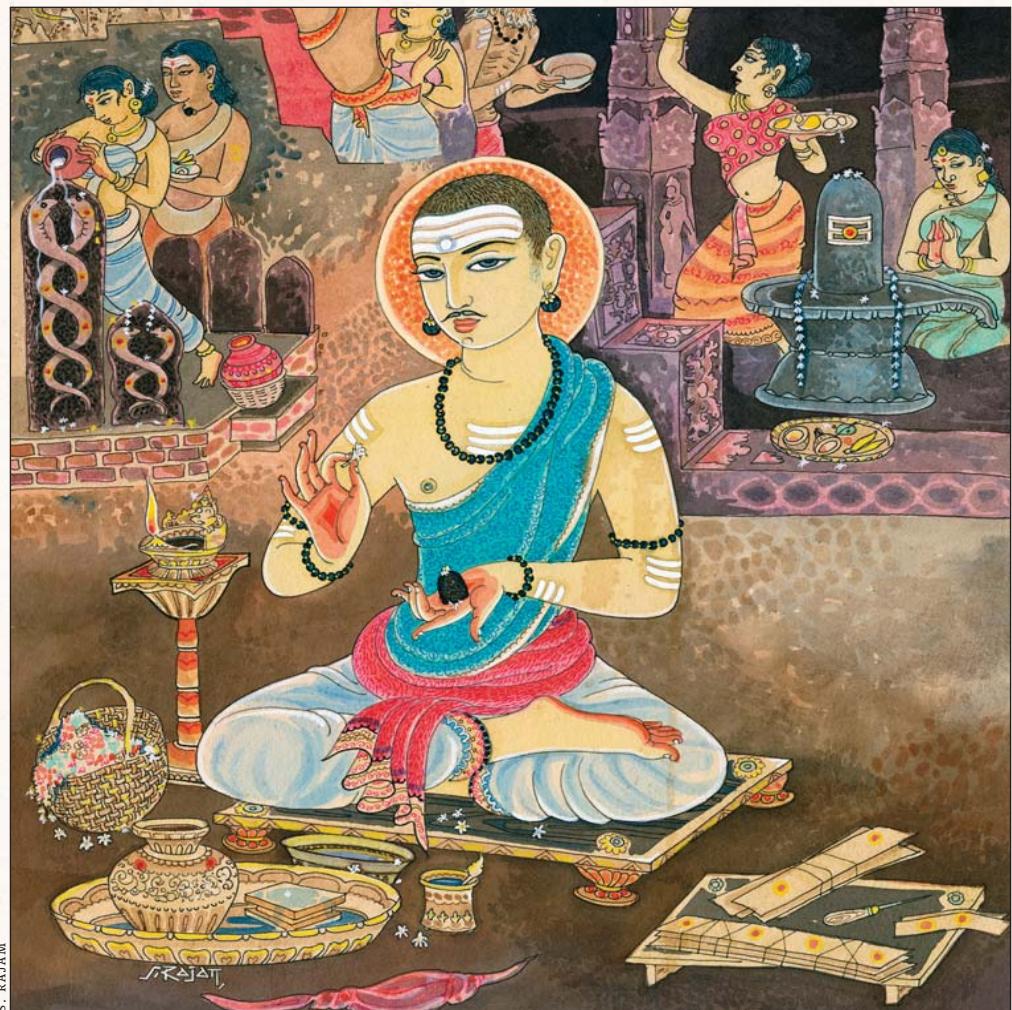


Sri Shivarathri Mahaswami in his personal worship

Finally, monks finally bring him a silver lotus flower with a hole in the center, which he fits around the linga to make his hand a tray for flowers. His palm still touches the stone, in intimate contact with Divinity. Everyone in the room chants the 108 names of Siva with enraptured devotion. The guru invites his monks and guests to also offer flowers to the altar that is his hand.

Seated close together, Swami and the HINDUISM TODAY team wave lamps of burning camphor and ghee in circles. At the height of the ceremony, blessings seem to fill the room like infinite inner light. God is in all, all is God.

The sun has risen. The day may now begin for the head of Suttur Math.



Vachanas, the fiery verses of Basava

(above) Artist S. Rajam's painting of Basava

The Vachanas, pithy pieces of poetic prose in easy-to-understand yet compelling language, are an integral element of Vira Saivism and Kannada literature. Composed in the common Kannada language, the simple aphorisms helped bring Vira Saiva philosophy to the common folk and propagate them to a wider audience.

In Basava's verses, Lord Siva is usually called *Kundala Sangama*, the Lord of Meeting Rivers.

The rich will make temples for Siva. What shall I, a poor man, do? My legs are pillars, my body the shrine, my head a capstone of gold. Listen, O Lord of the Meeting Rivers: Things standing shall fall, but the moving shall ever stay.
(Basavanna 820)

The pot is a god. The winnowing fan is a god. The stone in the street is a god. The comb is a god. The bowstring is also a god. The bushel is a god and the spouted cup is a god. Gods, gods, there are so many there's no place left for a foot. There is only one God. He is the Lord of the Meeting Rivers.
(Basavanna 563)

They plunge wherever they see water. They circumambulate every tree they see. O Lord, how can they know you who adore waters that run dry and trees that wither?
(Basavanna 581)

The crookedness of the serpent is straight enough for the snake hole. The crookedness of the river is straight enough for the sea. And the crookedness of our Lord's men is straight enough for our Lord!
(Basavanna 144)

The main tenets of Basavanna's teachings are simple enough to be understood by anyone: ardent love for God Siva only (rejecting other Deities); fierce support of social equality; and constant affirmation that Siva is everywhere, in everyone. He wrote verses in Kannada in a format known as *vachana*, or structured prose (see sidebar). One of these declares, "I'm the only devotee in this world, for all others are Siva."

Basava is believed to have been born to a Brahmin family in a village called Bagewadi, in the Bijapur district of Northern Karnataka. From a young age, as a student at the Saivite religious center of Kudalasangama, he rebelled against the divisions and rigid barriers of the prevailing caste system, which violated the principle of universalism pervading the stories of great saints. As an adult, he joined the court of the Saiva King Bijjala (1157-1167 CE), who ruled from Kalyana (now called Basavakalyan), about 37 miles from Gulbarga in northern Karnataka. He married the daughter of a wealthy man and, through his own merit and formidable intellect, became a chief minister and financial advisor to the king.

One of Basavanna's chief innovations was the personal worship of the Linga as Lord Siva. The adherents called Lingayats are by far the main Vira Saiva group today. The name is derived from the Kannada word *Lingavantha* (one who adorns the Linga).

By advocating personal, daily worship of the Lord, he broke with the established idea that priests were essential for a true communion with the Divine. If anyone, whether brahmin or Dalit, could wear a Sivalinga, lower castes felt empowered even if barred from attending temple services.

Basavanna began expounding his philosophy while at court in Kalyana. He preached that the devotion of people to God is a direct relationship that does not require priests as middlemen. He banned untouchability for those initiated into Ishtalinga worship. He rejected the social caste system but embraced the principle of duty and reincarnation. Karma, he explained, was not fate. One's place in society should be determined more by *kayaka* (the kind of work one performs) than by one's social position at birth. In Basava's philosophy, all people are born equal and gain or lose standing according to their actions in the present life.

He was a fiery poet, often writing vachanas which boldly clashed with the established order (see sidebar). Many people have been burned at the stake in Europe for lesser heresies, showing how tolerant Hinduism can be of dissenters. And there was much for him to lose. By allowing untouchables to have lunch at his residence and praising the unheard-of marriage of a Brahmin woman and an untouchable man, Basava raised the ire of local nobles. Under pressure, King Bijjala ordered the mismatched married couple to be harshly punished. Basavanna strongly protested, and the king ordered him to either be silent or leave. He left.

He wandered the countryside, preaching about humanity, morality, honesty, simplicity, the dignity of labor and equality among all humans. He left his body a few months later, on September 30, 1196, at age 62.

The pithy wisdom and reformist messages of Basavanna's teachings attracted followers from far and wide, and the movement grew. Other saints joined, male and female, reformers who carried on his message. They are known as Siva Sharanas (those who seek refuge in Siva): Allama Prabhu, Akka Mahadevi and Channabasavanna, Basavanna's nephew. They formed the nucleus of the Lingayat faith, which soon spread and flourished.

Creating an Ishtalinga

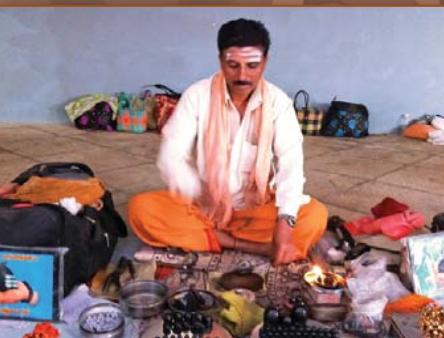
(from the top) At fairs like the jathra, one can see a Lingayat craftsman creating the sacred Ishtalingas; using fire, he will enclose a tiny stone Sivalinga in a special wax made of more than 50 substances and said to have medicinal properties, to form a larger, elliptical linga shape. This is what the faithful wear around their neck at all times, usually in a silver container called karadige, to be revealed only at the time of their sacred daily personal puja

Even though Basavanna was born many decades after Suttur Math was founded, his theology and philosophy shaped the practices of Suttur, which today is completely a Lingayat monastery. This was not a rift, just a greater emphasis on service to all and personal daily worship.

Lingayatism is a development of the original Vira Saiva theology. Lingayat philosophy urges seekers towards a true union of the soul with Siva, described as *sunya*, void or nothingness, through a progressive six-stage path of devotion and surrender, until soul and God are fused in a final state of perpetual God consciousness. To attain this and stay on the right path, seekers follow a five-fold code of conduct (*panchachara*): *lingachara* (daily worship of the personal Sivalinga), *sadachara* (duty and work), *sivachara* (acknowledging Siva as the one God who is equally in all people), *bhrityachara* (humanity towards all creatures) and *dasoha* (nurturing and caring for the community).

The progressiveness of Lingayat philosophy and culture played a significant role during India's freedom struggle, when new national leaders advocated new values—abjuration of caste, women's empowerment and suffrage—which had been central pillars of Lingayatism for centuries. *The Times of India*, in its issue dated May 17, 1918, paid a glowing tribute: "Basava sketched and boldly tried to work out a large and comprehensive programme of social reform with the elevation and independence of womanhood as its guiding point. Neither social conferences which are usually held in these days in several parts of India, nor Indian social reformers can improve upon that programme as to the essentials. The present-day social reformer in India is but speaking the language and seeking to enforce the mind of Basava."

Though temple worship was de-emphasized by Basavanna, it was not prohibited. Vira Saivism's tradition of devotion includes temple worship, and Suttur Math is recognized for preserving and protecting several temples. Recently, it renovated several ancient dilapidated places of wor-





ship under the guidance of Ganapati Sthapati, India's late Vastu temple-building expert.

Ascetics, saints, yogis and swamis of all traditions are revered by Lingayats and awarded distinguished respect. The *jangamas* (literally "on the move"), renunciates who move from place to place spreading the message of Vira Saivism, are the guardians of the faith, reinvigorating it and correcting deviations anywhere they go. These days, they are few, but of legendary dedication.

Initiated Lingayats are staunch vegetarians, teetotalers, and non-smokers. They eschew any habits that might sully the sanctity of the God who is with them.

Ishtalinga Puja

The wearing and daily worship of the Ishtalinga—a tiny personal Sivalinga, worn by the devotee at all times—is a unique aspect of Lingayatism. This special Linga is made from stone, with all the proper Agamic proportions. It is then enveloped in a protective sheath concocted of 57 herbs, minerals and wax and skillfully shaped by craftsmen to resemble a black ovoid Sivalinga without its base. This is encased in a small wood or silver casket called *karadige* with a string attached for wearing around the neck.

Lingadharane, the ceremony of initiation among Lingayats, can be performed at any age, but it is usually done before birth, in the seventh month of pregnancy. The family guru performs puja and gives the Linga to the mother, who then ties it to her own Ishtalinga until birth. At birth, the mother immediately secures the new Ishtalinga to her child. At around eight to eleven years old, the child receives diksha to perform per-

sonal puja. Nandeesh, a senior devotee and volunteer, explains the significance: "With Ishtalinga puja, the person's confidence level soars. He knows God is with him, within him, and he does not have to look elsewhere. The realization that God is part of him prevents him from taking to bad ways and indulging in unethical practices."

From birth to death, the child wears the Linga on the chest, over the heart. After death the person is buried with the Ishtalinga in the left hand, just as for the daily puja. (Lingayat tradition mandates burial, not cremation.) Every Lingayat who wears the Ishtalinga literally holds God in his palm.

Puja to the Ishtalinga consists of offering water, milk, honey, curd, sugar, banana, fruits, vibhuti, flowers, bilva leaves and more, along with the chanting of mantras and vachanas in Kannada. Properly performed, the ritual takes over an hour, through which the Linga is continuously held still on the left palm, which is quite a strenuous discipline.

Sadly, observing this daily personal worship is not universal among Lingayats anymore. "All Lingayats, whether sannyasis or householders, are obligated to perform this puja religiously. But things have changed with the advent of modern living and globalization. Very few, especially among the young, adhere to this. They wear the Ishtalinga, but pujas have become shortened and many don't find the time for worship," la-

ments Gangadharan, a prominent Lingayat and devotee of Suttur Math.

As in any religion, not all followers embrace all the principles of the faith. Basavanna's ideals have not yet completely erased the caste system among Lingayats. Especially regarding marriages, an older mentality still exists, though usually concealed.



COURTESY JSS

An ancient spiritual center where temples and buildings look brand new



COURTESY JSS

(left) A deer walks by the entrance to the shrine of Adi Jagadguru Sri Shivarathreeshwara. By legend, he did not leave his body in the normal manner, but went into deep meditation to attain vidyaryanya, the yogic power to leave the body consciously. It is said that he is still at that spot, sited in yogic pose under the ground. (above) Inside the shrine, a small murti for the great yogi sits on a large Nandi, coated with butter and adorned with fruits and peppers, a playful form of worship.



Inside a Vast Organization

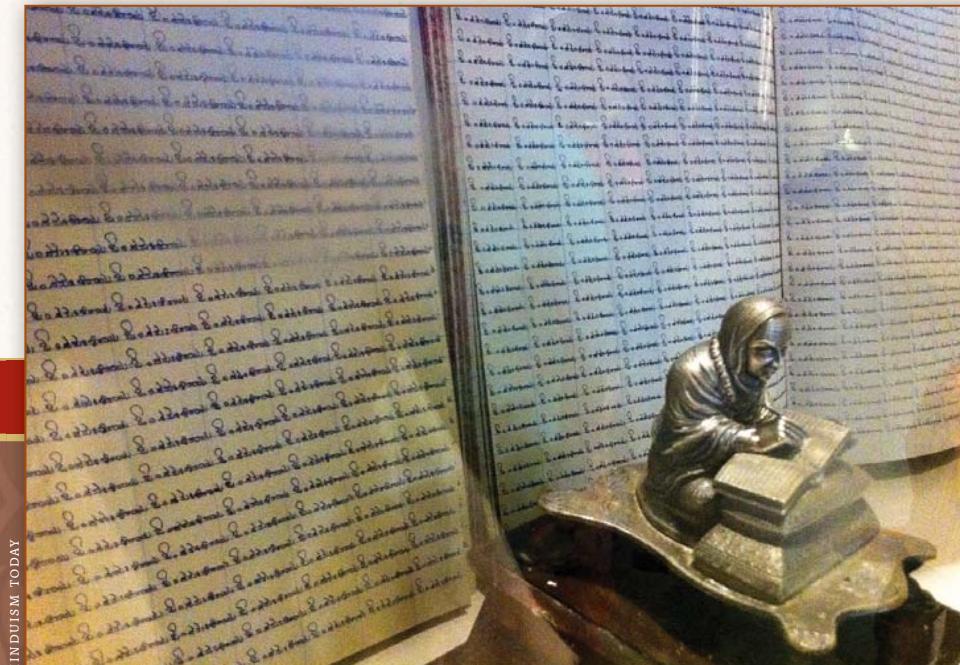
BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, SUTTUR

SUTTUR MATH IS A NEXUS OF SOCIAL activities. A pivotal figure in this development was the 22nd guru, Sri Pattada Shivarathreeshwara Swami. In his mid-forties, Swamiji fell critically ill. All treatments failed to improve his condition. He remained unconscious, and there was little hope of his recovery. Swamiji's successor, young Rajendra, anxiously rushed to Mysore and brought the Mysore Palace pandit, Gowrishankar, widely respected for his knowledge and insights. The pandit bid the unconscious sage to get up, saying there

was much work ahead of him. Swamiji got up. Handing him a pen and book the Pandit directed him to begin writing the panchakshara mantra, "Aum Namasivaya." That was his cure, and that became his mission.

Pattada Swamiji wrote the mantra relentlessly, 12 hours each day, without fail, for ten years. Because of this tapas, he came to be known as Mantra Maharishi.

During HINDUISM TODAY's visit to Suttur Math, the team visited a series of shrines for the last three gurus of the *parampara* (lineage). The shrine for the Mantra Maharishi radiated an unusually intense shakti. One of



HINDUISM TODAY

the Suttur swamis went to the shrine and brought out the source of that tangible spiritual power—a book the guru had filled with the Aum Namasivaya mantra, in handwriting so perfect it seemed almost like print. By the end of his life, Mantra Maharishi had written the mantra 22 million times, filling hundreds of such books, creating artifacts of spiritual power and devotion which are now spread throughout the math.

Focus on Education

Under the guidance of Mantra Maharishi and his tireless successor, Suttur focused its gaze on education as a means to transform society, and the math itself. Maharishi had not received a formal education, but he recognized its value and importance. Determined that his successor be educated, he sent Rajendra to Mysore to study Sanskrit. While still a teenager, in 1928 Rajendra Swamiji set up the first hostel at Mysore to share educational facilities with poor students. In the 1930s Mantra Maharishi constructed a primary school for deprived children who would normally not receive an education.

Hostels for poor children were started

(left) One of the books in which Mantra Maharishi wrote the Aum Namasivaya mantra, evoking awe with his meticulous precision. (top of page) The JSS School stands on 60 sprawling acres. Its main building is a massive edifice of 150,000 sq. ft. Most students are from poverty-struck regions of Karnataka.



in surrounding villages. High schools were founded in Mysore, Chamarajnagar and Nanjangud. Success encouraged the guru to start a college in Mysore, where he was closely associated with the royal family, as devotee Gangadharan points out. Further, "He utilized donations and resources well and invested in agriculture."

Today Suttur's educational system counts 310 schools from kindergartens to post-graduate centres, spread across the country. Gangadharan reflects, "All this happened with intuition and blessings of the gurus. Rajendra Swamiji would sit in *dhyana* at Adi Jagadguru's samadhi shrine and seek permission before embarking on any project. Only after receiving a sign of approval would he proceed. [Belief is that if a garland or flower drops from the Deity's right side, it is a sign of blessing; falling from the left side—signifies disapproval.] Every project or action has been undertaken with Adi Jagadguru's consent, even to this day."

Gangadharan continues, "I came to this institution in 1943 as an orphan with empty hands, without any resources or support. Because of Mantra Maharishi I received education enabling me to acquire three degrees, including a law degree. Ever since, I have been involved in serving all the JSS organizations and institutions."

The JSS Mahavidyapeetha (JSS MVP, the educational branch of Suttur Math) has over 50,000 students at any given point in time. The institutions include nurseries for toddlers of working rural women, schools to impart primary and secondary education in both local language and English, colleges, polytechnics, institutes of technology, medi-

cine colleges and gurukulas. JSS MVP is now present in almost every sphere of education. Colleges have been established even in far-off places, such as United States, Mauritius, Dubai and South Africa. Shrewd management and keen and continued watchful supervision from the gurus have ensured ongoing success and sustainability.

A Continued Leadership

The current guru, Sri Shivarathri Mahaswami, who ascended to the pitham (spiritual seat of authority) even before his 30th birthday, had big sandals to fill. Judging by the results, he never flinched. A laconic man, Sri Shivarathri Mahaswami has a keen eye for detail and a unique method of communication, often speaking in sharp silence with his eyes, directing with a glance or a wave of hand, making Spartan use of spoken words. "He has the ability to identify talent and to rope in the right people for his organization. He also has a vision and is willing to synergize this with the vision of others if there is scope for development. He has a progressive mind," says Dr. V. Prakash, India's leading nutritionist and food technologist.

Suttur Math's branches are led by able administrators, Mahaswamiji's brothers, other immediate family and loyalists who have grown under the benevolence of the math. The guru himself is in complete command and control of every activity. After his personal daily worship, his routine is packed with discussions with religious leaders, visits to temples and villages across the state and reviewing the math's educational institutions and activities. Amidst all this, he still finds time to make himself available to devo-

tees and visitors, and to travel abroad.

Education As Service

The imposing JSS School at Suttur, has an inspiring story, which Mahadevappa, one of the teachers, narrates: "In 2001, there was a stone quarry near Mysore where workers were being forced to work 18 hours a day as bonded laborers. Some had been chained. Swamiji wanted to give their children a better education. The math took all the workers' children under its care. Swami later traveled in the interior of North Karnataka and found that there, too, the children of the extremely poor were deprived of education. He announced that whoever wanted their child to receive education could bring them to Suttur, and the math would take care of them! In a few days, lorry loads of children arrived. We were not geared up for such a response. So overnight, the plans to make this an international school were shelved. The children were accommodated in this palatial building, and the school was started."

The school now has 3,700 children from the first to tenth grades. They belong to various religions and regions. Their boarding and lodging and all other needs are provided at no charge. The math has assigned village women as their caretakers, to ensure they receive the warmth and care of being in a home. "We have not compromised on the quality of education just because it is free," says Mahadevappa.

Village women are also employed to roll 10,000 chapattis every day and cut vegetables. "Instead of mechanizing the system, Swamiji felt this would not only provide employment to the village women and keep

them engaged, the food would also have a personal touch," says Nandeesh.

Other Activities

The educational empire initiated during the time of Shivarathreeshwara Swami is just one part of Suttur Math's social programs. The math now employs over 15,000 personnel. Nearly 300,000 patients receive treatment at their hospitals and health centers. A hi-tech 3,000-bed hospital has just opened at Suttur, catering to the wealthy but also providing state-of-the-art medical treatment to the poor, free of charge. Many of the JSS institutions are commercially operated, charging for their services. But the fees

charged of those who can afford payment are widely transmuted into free services for those who cannot.

"Equal focus is placed on religious activities," says Gangadharan. Suttur Math runs gurukulas at Mysore and Suttur, training 150 children in traditional knowledge and rituals. They are later sent to various Lingayat maths in villages and towns that are under the cover of Suttur Math. The gurukula at Suttur, established in 2000, offers residential training to deserving disciples. Discourses on *Agamas* and the *Vedas* are held at the gurukula for disciples. The students also partake in religion camps.

The math also has mobile vans in which a

monk goes into villages and gives an *Ishtalinga* to Lingayats who have not been initiated and perform Lingadharane for those who wish to join the Lingayat faith.

For elderly retirees who wish to live a simple, religious life close to holy temples, the math has created the Hiriyya Mane, an old-age home, with qualified care staff who provide essential care and comfort.

Farming is by no means forgotten, as many, if not most, Suttur devotees are farmers. The JSS Krishi Vigyan Kendra project uses biotechnology to empower the farming community. It has trained over 10,000 farmers in scientific methods such as soil testing, composting, and creating a seed processing unit and a composting facility.

The Community

Community ties are a large part of the math's activities. Apart from education, the Math is involved in providing healthcare, employment, empowerment opportunities for women, vocational training, while reviving folk arts and traditional ways of life.

Suttur's philosophy and activities are highlighted most visibly each year during the dazzling jathra festival. That great annual confluence of humanity provides an opportunity for celebration and renewal of faith and brings together professionals with the uneducated, those who are empowered with those who seek empowerment. But every day of the year, every year, Suttur Math works quietly, steadily and efficiently to uphold the ideals of Adi Jagadguru and Basava. This has been the way of the Vira Saiva Suttur Math for centuries, under the keen administration and profound devotion of its gurus.

Organization, cleanliness and dedication are the hallmarks of Suttur Math



(left) A statue of Sri Rajendra Mahaswamigal, a seer who emphasized the value of education and shaped the math's current success; (above) experimental organic farming at the JSS KVK agricultural program

ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY JSS



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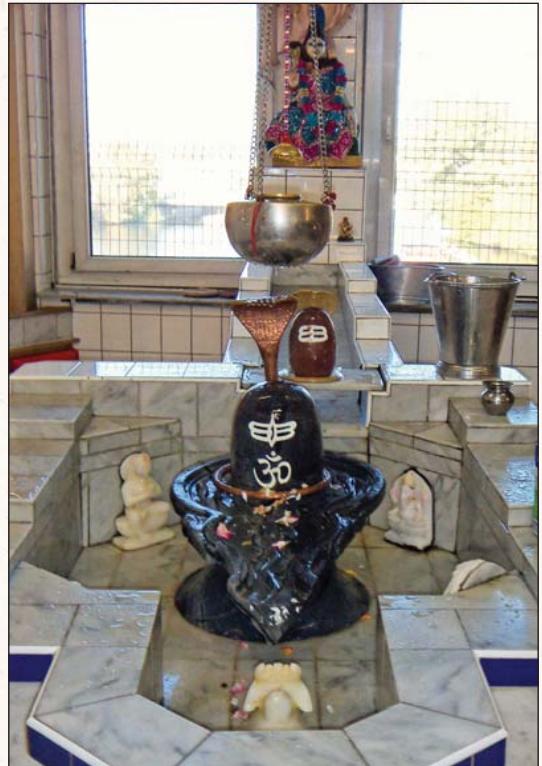
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(clockwise from above) Students are gathered for the daily worship ceremony at Suttur Srikrishna; the Dasoha Bhavana building, where Hindu hospitality is offered to thousands in the form of lodging, food and care, especially during festivals; the facade of a MVP higher education institution



ALL PHOTOS: HARI BANSHE JHA

TEMPLES

Afghan Hindus Stand Strong in Germany

Three thousand miles from their ancestral home, emigres carry on their religious traditions with pride and dynamism

BY DR. HARI BANSHE JHA

AMONG GERMANY'S 48 HINDU TEMPLES, THE ONE ESTABLISHED by the Hindu community of Afghanistan, in 1999 at Billstrasse 77 in Hamburg, Germany, has a unique character due to the history of its founders. I made this discovery in September 2011 on a trip from my home in Kathmandu, Nepal, to do some research at the German Institute of Global and Area Studies.

Flight from Persecution

Many of Germany's Hindus are refugees from Afghanistan, where Hindus have been methodically persecuted and tortured since the reign of King Zahir Shah, 1930-1973. Their status became grave after the invasion by the Soviet Union and the rise of the Taliban. From 1980 onward, Afghan Hindus were religiously persecuted as "kafirs." Afghanistan's one million Hindus had two choices: either embrace Islam or leave the country. Rather than compromise their religion, the majority opted to emigrate—risking their lives and leaving behind land and property that had belonged to their families for generations. Most took refuge in Germany, Canada, USA, Holland, Russia, Italy, England and India. By the year 2000, it was estimated that only 531 Hindus remained in Afghanistan.

Approximately 2,000 Afghan refugee families live in Germany. The largest number (600 families) are in Hamburg, followed by Köln (450 families), Frankfurt (400 families) and Essen (200 families). Their emotional roots are in India. Most speak Hindi, follow the Indian calendar and believe in the purity of the Ganga and its sacred water. When they reached Germany, they had nothing to claim as their own. They had no shelter, no temple and no place for a social gathering. They have since established five Hindu temples and two Sikh Gurudwaras in Germany—in Hamburg, Essen, Köln and Frankfurt.

Proud to Be Hindu First, Afghan Second

I happened to meet a Hindu Afghan on my first day in Hamburg. Having arrived and settled in the morning, I had a meal delivered in the afternoon by someone I assumed was Nepalese, as my landlord was a Nepali. But when I asked the gentleman a question in Nepali, he made it clear that he did not know that language, stating, "I am a Hindu, Suraj, from Afghanistan." It was a refreshing surprise to hear someone so forthrightly introduce himself as Hindu!

A few days later, when I was traveling in a local boat at the Ham-



Inside—a beautiful mandir: (clockwise from left) Sivalinga shrine inside the temple; entry way through a humble looking, unadorned exterior; devotees gathered for Navaratri arati; magnificent marble images of Siva and Parvati

burg harbor, I asked an Indian-looking man to take my picture with my camera. He asked if I spoke Hindi, then introduced himself, in Hindi, as a Hindu Afghan. Once again I was surprised, since Indians and Nepalese rarely introduce themselves as Hindus. But Hindus from Afghanistan introduce themselves first as Hindu and only second as Afghan. It seems their tragic persecution has awakened a strong awareness and pride in their Hindu identity.

The faith of Afghan Hindus runs deep into the past. Hinduism has a long and glorious history in Afghanistan. In the Mahabharata period, some 5,000 years ago, the wife of Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, was from Kandahar. There is a famous Siva temple in Kandahar even to this day. The Hindus in this land followed Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism, and the ancient rites of the Vedic fire worship were observed in Afghanistan for millennia.

The Temple—Center of the Community

Now fascinated with Germany's Hindu Afghans, I made a point to visit their temple in Hamburg. It was the eighth day of Navaratri, and a Vedic yagna (fire sacrifice) was being offered to Goddess Durga. You can catch a glimpse of the puja on YouTube, bit.ly/german-hindus. In the temple, I saw magnificent murtis of many Gods and Goddesses, including Sita-Ram, Radha-Krishna, Siva-Parvati, Hanuman, Narsimha and Durga.

Built in 1999 at a cost of US\$1.2 million, the temple is very active. On Sundays over 200 devotees attend—not only Afghan Hindus, but Indians and also German students who want to learn more about Hinduism. In addition to the daily worship, special weekly pujas and satsangs by the devotees, the temple celebrates most annual festivals such as Navaratri, Lakshmi puja, Basant Panchami, Holi, Mahasivaratri, Ramanavami and Krishnastami.

The temple has blossomed over the years, hosting many meditation, yoga and bhajan programs. In the future, they want to introduce



more regular educational classes, including the study of Hindi. Many of the devotees shared that it is Hamburg temple that has kept Hindu unity intact, and their faith has been strengthened and fortified due to the religious freedom they enjoy in Germany.

I asked a number of temple devotees to share their vision of the significance of the temple. Radha Goswami: "Our community felt the need for a temple to promote Hindu religion and culture." Ram Saha: "We wanted to have a temple as a place for discussing community-related problems." Sita: "We had no place for social gatherings, marriage rites or performance of the death rituals. So we thought we should have a temple to meet these needs." Ravindra: "We needed a temple to pass on the Hindu samskaras to the children. The temple is the place where the children are given practical demonstration as to how the samskaras are transmitted."

It was Shanti who summed it up for me: "We wanted to build the temple for the protection and promotion of Sanatan Hindu Dharma. Dharma, for us, is above everything."



EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

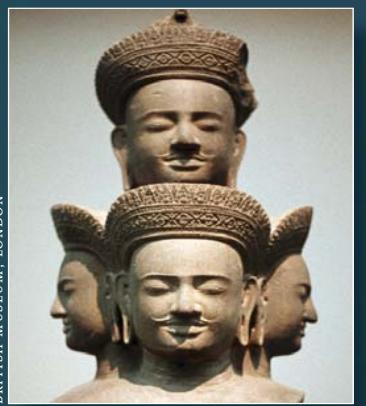
Five Powers of Siva

Sadasiva in the Agama Scriptures

A Rarely Explored Form of Siva Reveals the Saivite Hindu Understanding of Divinity and Cosmology

THE VEDAS DECREE THAT GOD CREATED THE world, and it is true, he did; but that is a simplistic rendering of a mind-bogglingly complex event. It would be like saying a child grows from two microscopic cells. It is true. But looking deeper, both processes are exquisitely magical and complex beyond belief. The growth of two cells into a human being of 100 trillion cells is a process capable of bringing tens of thousands of scientists to their knees. Imagine, then, comprehending the evolution of the entire universe, from God and of God, filled with 100 trillion galaxies. But understanding God's acts of creation, preservation, dissolution, concealment and revelation is exactly what the ancient Hindu seers undertook, aided, they would say, by the *Agamas*, sacred texts composed by God Himself.

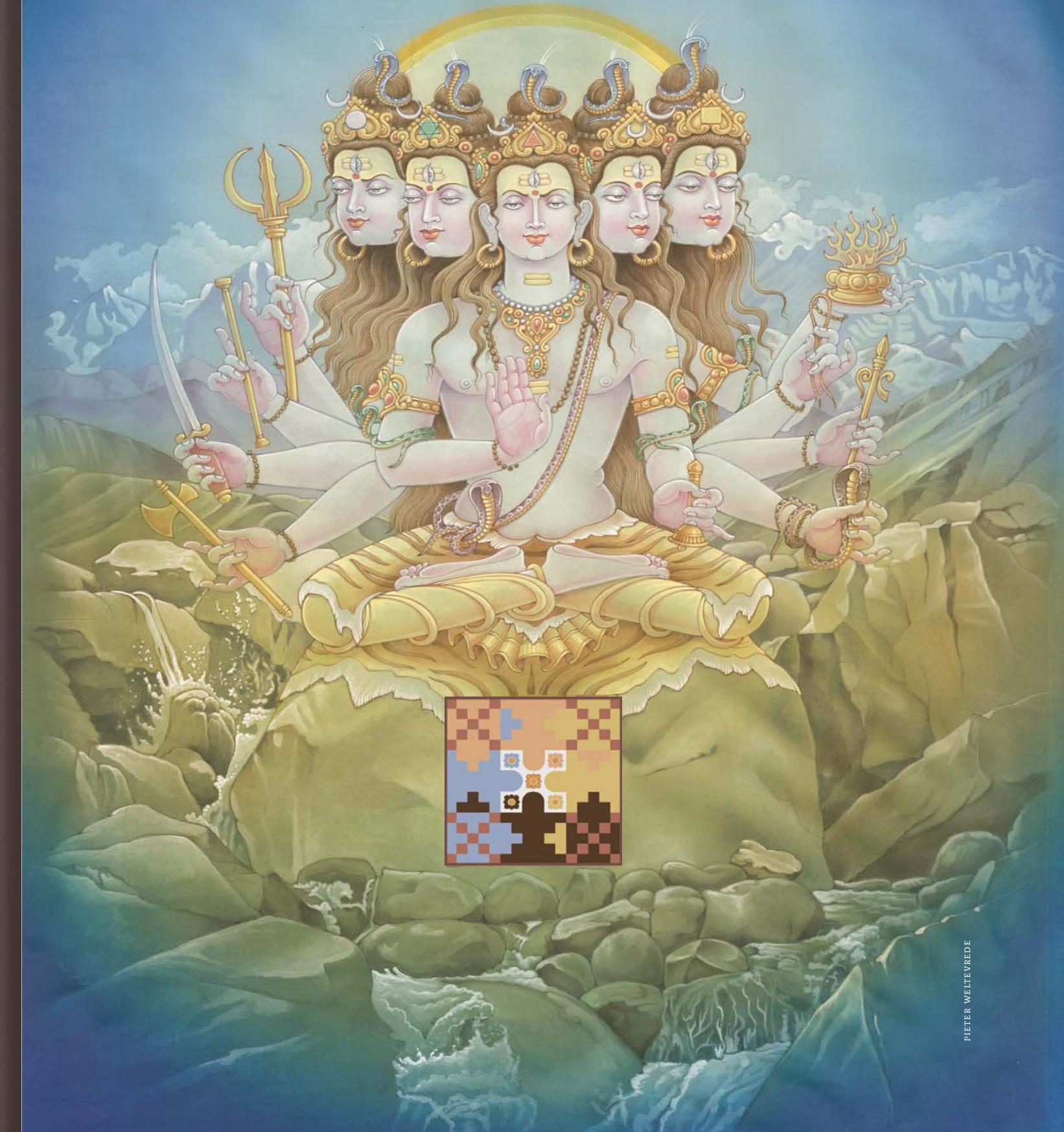
With more than a little trepidation, we undertake to bring forth a summary of what they teach of God and His powers. We were taxed to do this, and we have no doubt the reader will be similarly challenged to comprehend it all, though we hope our several charts will provide an overview of some textual complexities. Still, this central and profound part of ancient India's understanding of our cosmos and our innermost being is well worth the effort. It will give the Hindu priest enhanced insight into the deeper meanings of the temple puja. It will give the advanced meditator new ways to explore the subtle dimensions, the superconscious mind of God within. It will give theologians grist for their philosophical and cosmological mills. It will likely give everyone else a headache.



This bust of the five-faced Siva is from Cambodia's Angkor period, mid-10th century

Illustration: A modern artist's rendering of the ancient five-faced form of Siva called Sadasiva, the ever auspicious Lord, sitting in the high Himalayas at the source of the river Ganga, with Her waters pouring off the page. The five faces (from left to right) are Ishana, Tatpurusha, Aghora, Vamadeva and Sadyojata. They radiate, in order, revealment of grace, sublimation of the five senses, omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience. This sequence is the creative cycle, when reversed the cycle of dissolution is depicted. The five-hooded snakes indicate the need to exercise caution, use wisdom, resist temptation, move carefully and use discrimination. His ten arms denote the consummate ability to tackle difficulties. His hand raised in blessing, facing forward, carries the message "Have no fear; you will attain liberation." Four faces are said to have revealed the *Vedas*; the fifth (Ishana) revealed the *Agamas*. Each face bears a geometric shape above the forehead which represents one of the five elements and identifies the Lord. He sits on a tiger skin which blocks worldly vibrations that keep devotees earth-bound.

BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON





Introduction

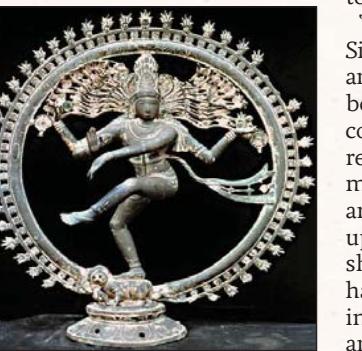
The Five Powers of Siva

by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



LORD SIVA IS COMMONLY THOUGHT OF AS THE GOD OF DESTRUCTION, one Divinity among a divine trinity, along with Brahma, Lord of Creation, and Vishnu, Lord of Preservation. This theological perspective, especially espoused in Smarta Hinduism, is based in the *Puranas*, Hindu folk narratives containing ethical and cosmological teachings about Gods, man and the world. But other denominations, including Saiva Hinduism, which is based on the *Saiva Agamas*, hold a different view. In these revealed scriptures the three great cosmic actions are all performed by God Siva. In addition to creation, preservation and destruction, Siva performs two more actions which relate specifically to the soul. With the fourth, called obscuration, He veils Himself from us, the embodied souls, purposefully limiting our awareness, keeping us ensconced in the world—oblivious to our true nature, our past and future lives and karmas—thus allowing us to evolve. This beguiling force is called veiling or concealing grace, *tirodhana shakti*. With His fifth action or power, called revelation, *anugraha shakti*, Lord Siva frees us from the illusion of separateness from Him, granting us realization of our true identity. The *Raurava Agama* proclaims: "The birth of the world, its maintenance, its destruction, the soul's obscuration and liberation are the five acts of His dance."

Siva Nataraja, Lord of Dance, a well-known *murti* (worshipful icon), clearly depicts these five actions. Creation, or emanation (*srishti*), is represented by His upper right hand holding the drum upon which He beats *Paranada*, the Primal Sound, from which issue forth the rhythms and cycles of creation. Preservation (*sthiti*) is represented by His lower right hand, held in the gesture of blessing, *abhaya mudra*, indicating "fear not." Destruction (*samhara*), dissolution or absorption, is symbolized by the fire in His upper left hand, held in *ardha-chandra mudra*, "half-moon gesture." Obscuring grace (*tirodhana*), the power which hides the truth from souls, thereby permitting experience, growth and eventual fulfillment of destiny, is represented by His right foot upon the prostrate person, *apasmarapurusha*, who symbolizes the principle of ignorance,



Nataraja: In the Makuta Agama, we are instructed to contemplate the blissful form of the dancing Lord, Sri Nataraja, as appearing with the same features as Sadasiva.

or *anava*. Revealing grace (*anugraha*), which grants knowledge and severs the soul's bonds, is symbolized by Siva's raised left foot, and by His lower left hand, held in *gajahasta* or "elephant trunk" mudra, inviting approach.

Little known to the general public, but quite well known to the Saivite priesthood, is another form of God Siva performing these five actions. This form of Siva has five faces and is called Sadasiva. In Sanskrit the five faces are referred to as *Panchabrahma*, meaning "five great Lords." The term *Brahma* in this context does not refer to the four-faced creator God (Brahmā). A description of *Panchabrahma* is given in the *Ajita Agama* (20, 158-164a) in the form of instructions to temple priests:

"After thus constructing mentally the throne of Siva, holding a handful of flowers, with steady mind and controlled senses, one should meditate on Siva's body sitting in the lotus posture, shining with the color of pure crystal, endowed with five heads, serene, with smiling faces, having the brilliance of ten million suns, of new full-blown youth, with ten arms, brightened by a crest of tawny tresses rolled upwards, each face having three radiant eyes, or *shaktis*, with the crescent moon of wisdom in His hair, the cause of all causes, His right hands holding the no-fear posture, a trident, an axe, a sword and a thunderbolt, His left hands holding a noose, a serpent, an elephant goad, fire and a bell, all fit for a supreme sovereign, endowed with every auspicious mark, adorned with ample ornaments, in radiant raiments, attractive, having beautiful garlands and an ointment of sandalwood paste."

In his commentary on *Mrigendra Agama*, Aghorāśivacharya (12th century) is careful to point out that while we speak of Siva with five faces and many limbs, He does not actually possess these features. This visualization is only for the sake of meditation and adoration.

In Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, Lord Siva, God, is All and in all, and is understood in three modes: formless (*nishkala*), formed-formless (*sakala-nishkala*), and formed (*sakala*). In the formless mode, Siva is Absolute Reality, *Parasiva*; in the formed-formless mode, Siva is Pure

limbs, He does not actually possess these features. This visualization is only for the sake of meditation and adoration.



The drum symbolizes the power of creation.

1. Sadyojata ("quickly birthing"), the controlling Lord of Brahma, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of creation. His direction is west, He is related to the sphere of earth (*prithivi mandala*) and His Panchakshara Mantra syllable is *Na*. The Agamas describe Him as white in color, in the likeness of a boy with a charming face, besmeared with sandalwood paste, adorned with white flowers. One hand displays the boon-granting *varada mudra* and another the fear-not *abhaya mudra*. He is Siva manifest in all of nature; the cause of birth.



I. Sadyojata: Siva's Power of Creation



Consciousness, Parashakti; in the formed mode, Siva is Personal Lord, Parameshvara. Siva is represented in the main shrine of nearly all Siva temples as the Sivalinga. This aniconic murti represents the formed-formless aspect of God. Metaphysically, the Absolute Reality, Parasiva, which is formless, comes to be known as Sadasiva when He presents Himself in the Sivalinga. *Sadasiva* means eternally pure and auspicious. In temple ceremonies (puja) based on the *Saiva Agamas*, it is this five-fold form of Siva that is being worshiped in the Sivalinga. To show this, some temples include in their decorations a metal covering over the Linga with four faces engraved in it. The fifth face, Ishana, may be shown on the top, but is most commonly omitted. Some Sivalingas have the faces carved into the Linga itself. The Ishana face looks upward and is of pure crystal color. Tatpurusha faces east and is gold in color. Aghora faces south and is blue-black in color. Vamadeva is turned northward and is saffron in color. Sadyojata looks west and is white in color. In some temples, Panchabrahma is also represented by five distinct murtis displayed in a prominent place, such as on the outside of the main tower above the sanctum.

In the *Ajita Agama*, Sadasiva is said to be formed-formless because His body is made up of five mantras. In Sanskrit, this etheric vessel is termed *vidyadeha* or "knowledge body." The five mantras, known collectively as the Panchabrahma Samhita Mantra, are: *Ishana Murdha*, *Tatpurusha Vaktra*, *Aghora Hridaya*, *Vamadeva Guhya* and *Sadyojata Murta*. At the subtle level at which Sadasiva exists, there is still not a definite body in form, only the seeds or potentialities of sound, color and knowledge.

In his introduction to the *Ajita Agama*, Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat, offers insight into Sadasiva in Saiva Siddhanta: "Saivism is a religion of one God, the supreme Siva (Parasiva). Numerous entities are around Him. They are His creations and consequently His subjects with definite functions. They participate of His own essence in different degrees. The major ones among them are said to be engendered by Him or to be outward manifestations of Himself. We use the word *hypostasis*, or "sub-state," to refer to the concept of emanation of a subsidiary entity from the Supreme, as it expresses in the most general way the idea of existence separated from the essence without altering the unity of the latter.... The reason given for the fact of hypostasis of the Supreme God is the necessity of communication. The Supreme is characterized as inaccessible to senses, speech and mind. That would render worship impossible. The Supreme makes Himself accessible through accessible hypostases. In the Saiva religion, the main hypostasis is Sadasiva; and Saiva worship is precisely the worship of Sadasiva. The communication with the entity comes through five Brahma mantras, which are formulas of homage to five entities: Ishana, Tatpurusha, Aghorasiva, Vamadeva and Sadyojata. Communion is realized through the mental image of five heads, bearing the same names and placed, respectively, at the zenith, in the east, south, north and west. The basic action of the worshiper is meditation (dhyana) on these five heads. Meditation and bodily actions need a point of fixation (dharana), a material support and target. This is the Linga, a name given in the *Ajita Agama* only in its sense of 'sign.'"

Editor's Note: The term Parasiva, used by Bodhinatha above to mean Absolute Reality, carries the additional meaning of Siva as Mahadeva in the main text.

The Story of Creation

The process of gradual manifestation of the Primal and Uncaused Light

by Sabharathnam Sivacharyar

FROM THE *SAIVA AGAMA* SCRIPTURES, we gain a profoundly detailed explanation of the process by which the universe unfolds. The following is a lucid summary of such discussions in the *Kamika Agama*, *Vatula Agama*, *Raurava Agama* and *Kalottara Agama*.

Siva, in His fullness, is supreme consciousness with the effulgence of trillions and trillions of suns. Should that intensity be directly manifested, the worlds would be incinerated, and thus there exists a gradual descent of His presence, leading indirectly to Karma Sadakhya, the form worshiped as the Sivalinga.

Siva assumes innumerable forms in order to regulate the movement of the worlds and to liberate embodied souls. Some of these divine forms are momentary, such as those seen in visions by devotees, saints and sages; and others are eternal, such as Dakshinamurti and Siva as vanquisher of demons. Temporary and eternal forms of Siva all arise from the Sivalinga enshrined in Siva temples. Thus, the *Shilpa Shastras* categorically call the Sivalinga the primal image (*mula bimba*). The greatness and significance of Sivalinga can be understood only by understanding the order in which these transcendental manifestations are taking place.

Cosmic Creation

Lord Siva, existing in His blinding self-effulgence and love, creates countless souls, an act that is likened to sparks issuing from a blazing fire. Initially souls are incorporeal and enshrouded in the darkness of ignorance. That this veiling darkness may be understood and dissolved, souls need to be embodied in various worlds where they can experience both merits and demerits. Different forms of the Supreme God are necessary for them for the purpose of contemplation and worship. The *Agamas* speak of a motherly compassion spontaneously arising within Lord Siva to redeem and uplift the shrouded souls, a divine desire (*iccha*) resulting in a minute impulse or movement (*kshobha*) within Him. It is from this vibra-



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2. Vamadeva ("lovely, pleasing"), the controlling Lord of Vishnu, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of preservation. His direction is north, He is related to the sphere of water (*jala mandala*), and His Panchakshara Mantra syllable is *Ma*. The *Agamas* describe Him as red in color, with a handsome face and aristocratic bearing, wearing rich apparel, a turban and garlands of flowers. He holds a sword and a shield.

Siva's hand raised in blessing symbolizes preservation.



2. Vamadeva: Siva's Power of Preservation



tion, this divine love, that manifestation in its myriad forms appears.

That impulse of creativity brings forth a pulse, or Shakti, called Parashakti, which is one thousandth of Parasiva's brilliant radiance. Next, another Shakti, called Adishakti, arises as a thousandth of Parashakti. Next, Icchashakti manifests as one one-thousandth of Adishakti. Then Jnanashakti arises as one tenth of a hundredth of Icchashakti. Finally, Kriyashakti arises as a thousandth of Jnanashakti. Each Shakti is less subtle than the Shakti from which it arises. These five Shaktis are all transcendental and formless, never depicted as images, only contemplated upon.

Parashakti, profoundly subtle, all-pervasive and immeasurably effulgent, conceives the process of five-fold cosmic function. Adishakti, exceedingly brilliant, pervades embodied souls, as well as liberated souls. Icchashakti, greatly luminous, begins the process of creating the worlds and various bodies for the souls. Jnanashakti illuminates the Deities protecting the worlds and souls living in various planes of

existence. Kriyashakti instills power and ability in the cosmic authorities that perform the five-fold cosmic function.

In this same transcendental space, five Sivas manifest, each related to one of the five Shaktis and collectively called the Panchasivas: Anashrita, Anatha, Ananta, Vyomarupa and Vyapaka. Anashrita appears as one part out of a thousand parts of Parasiva. In the same way, Anatha arises out of Anashrita, Ananta out of Anatha, Vyomarupa out of Ananta, and Vyapaka out of Vyomarupa.

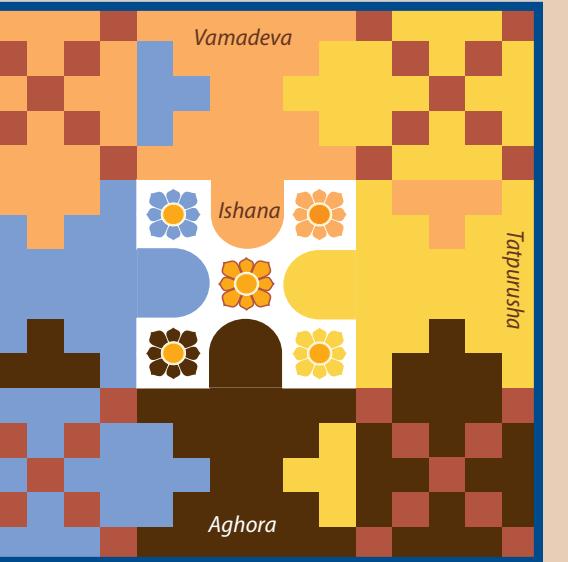
Emergence of the Five Sadakhyas

Next, each of the five Shaktis merges with its corresponding Siva. Upon the union of Parashakti and Anashrita, a form called Siva Sadakhy appears, flashing forth incessantly with the radiance of thousands of lightning bolts. It emerges as one of ten parts of Parashakti. This is the first and fundamental tattva, which serves as the causal source for the evolution of all other tattvas. *Sadakhy* means that

Gauri Lata Mandala

The meaning of the term *mandala*, as given in the *Agamas*, is "the square, the interior of which is enriched with various geometrical designs and beautified with colors." According to the *Agamas*, square is the basic form from which all other forms appear and into which they merge. In the *yagnashala* of a temple, a mandala is worshiped to channel the effects of the fire-ritual (oblations) and to enhance the auspiciousness of the surroundings. It is to be placed between the fire pit and the main altar (*vedika*). Though mandalas are not meant for meditation, the display of a perfectly designed mandala in a hall or shrine will ensure the divinity of the place and ward off any negative forces. Mandalas are of two kinds—those meant for use in temple rituals and those to be displayed in places of learning, hospitals, libraries and such. Mandalas consist of various important parts which correspond to various parts of a standing body, such as face, torso, hands, legs and so on. A mandala is actually a three-dimensional image rendered in two-dimensional form. The most important aspect of a mandala is its coloring. Each letter, each word of a mantra, each tattva, each kala, each form of a Deity, each of the vital airs of our body, each nadi (channel of the body), each element of the universe has its own significant color. Based on this concept, the guru who has a perfect knowledge of these principles and colors designs a particular mandala. The design of a mandala is based on the nature of a particular Deity to which that mandala belongs. Lord Sadasiva, five Sadakhy Saktis, Ashta Murtis, Ashta Vidyesvaras, Ashta Devatas (Nandi and others) and all the 36 tattvas are represented in the Gauri Lata Mandala.

Sabharathnam Sivacharyar

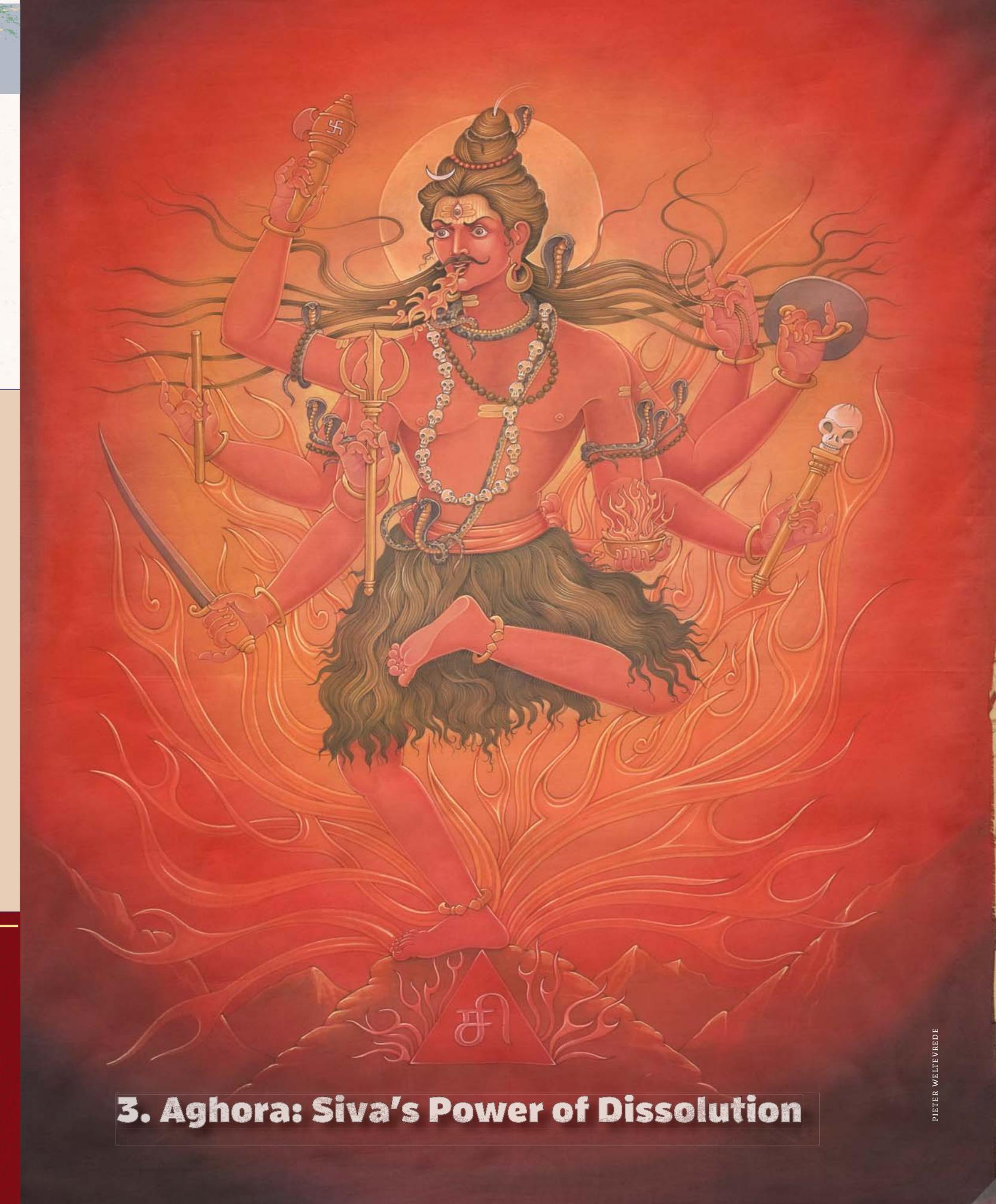


Divinity diagramed: This mandala is begun with a large square reticulated into 256 small squares. Applying the colors creates four major Lingas pointed inward (■), and six smaller, simpler Lingas (■) in each corner. The central lotus represents the Ishana murti. The other lotuses and the four major Lingas (clockwise from middle right) represent Tatpurusha, Aghora, Sadyojata and Vamadeva. In total, the mandala contains 28 Lingas, corresponding to 28 Saiva Agamas.



The fire represents Siva's power of dissolution.

3. Aghora ("nonterrifying"), the controlling Lord of Rudra, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of dissolution. His direction is south, He is related to the sphere of fire (*agni mandala*), and His Panchakshara Mantra syllable is *Si*. The *Agamas* state that Aghora Deva is the color of dark cloud and is adorned with crescent studded crown and beautiful earring. Though His expression is pleasant, His appearance is dreadful, with long, projecting teeth, and a tawny colored beard, moustache and matted hair. He is adorned with snakes and scorpions and a garland of skulls. The four hands on the left side hold a fire, khatvanga (a staff with a skull at its top), shield and noose. The four hands in the right side hold a trident, hatchet, sword and staff.



3. Aghora: Siva's Power of Dissolution



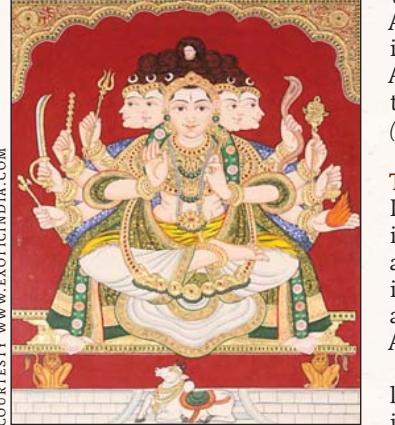
which is always pure and auspicious, undefiled by external or internal impurities and dispositions.

From the union of Adishakti and Anatha arises Amurti Sadakhy, as one tenth of Adishakti. It is likened to a fiery pillar with the brilliance of millions of suns. In the middle of that pillar is the vibrant presence of a luminous Linga called Divyalinga. Amurti Sadakhy, also called the primal pillar (*mula stambha*), serves as the source form for the occurrence of evolution and dissolution.

The union of Icchashakti and Ananta results in the emergence of Murti Sadakhy, comprising one-tenth of Icchashakti. It shines forth in the form of a fiery Linga, a blazing conflagration (*kalagni*), at the time of final dissolution (*maha pralaya*). In the upper part of that luminous Linga is a form with one face and three eyes, four hands, holding a deer, a hatchet and displaying the compassionate *varada mudra* and the fear-not *abhaya mudra*. This Sadakhy form, too, is not depicted as a visible image. It is to be contemplated only.

The union of Jnanashakti and Vyomarupa gives rise to Kartru Sadakhy as one-tenth of Jnanashakti. Kartru Sadakhy has the form of a crystal (*sphatika*) Linga, in the middle of which appears a beautiful, luminous form with four faces, twelve eyes, four colors, eight hands and two feet. The four hands on the right side display a trident, axe, sword and abhaya mudra; the four hands on the left side display a noose, snake, bell and varada mudra.

The union of Kriyashakti and Vyapaka gives rise to Karma Sadakhy as one-tenth of Kriyashakti. This is the most important Sadakhy form. It is in this form that the Linga and the pedestal (*pitha*) of the Sivalinga appear for the first time. The Linga denotes the vibrant state of sound, or *nada*. The pedestal denotes the vibrant state of *bindu*, the potency which actuates sound. Without bindu, sound is ineffectual.



From the South of India:
The five-faced Sadasiva
painted by M.S. Anand of
Mysore in the Tanjavor style.

The Linga denotes Siva, and the pedestal denotes Shakti. Karma Sadakhy is the united form of Siva and Shakti (Linga and *pitha*) for the systematic performance of the five cosmic functions.

In the same manner that the first five shaktis are manifested, there appear various other sets of Shaktis, each successively less subtle than the last. These include the five Paranada Kalas and the Aparanada Kalas. Along with the Paranada Kalas, there appear five Parabindu Kalas with the same effulgence. Corresponding to the five Aparanada Kalas, there appear five Aparabindu Kalas in the same manner and with the same effulgence. All of these manifestations explained so far exist in the transcendental realm known as pure creation (*shuddha shrishhti*), far beyond the physical world.

The Greatness of Karma Sadakhy

It has already been said that Karma Sadakhy appears in the form of Sivalinga, the combined form of Linga and pedestal. Now it is to be noted that the pedestal is constituted of five Aparabindu Kalas—Shantyatita and others. The Linga portion is constituted of five Aparanada Kalas—Urdhvagamini and others.

Parasiva is vibrantly present in the Siva Sadakhy. The presence of Parasiva and Siva Sadakhy is in the Amurti Sadakhy. In the Murti Sadakhy, there is the vibrant presence of Parasiva, Siva Sadakhy and Amurti Sadakhy. The presence of these four is in the Kartru Sadakhy. The vibrant presence of all five—Parasiva, Siva Sadakhy, Amurti Sadakhy, Murti Sadakhy and Kartru Sadakhy—is in the Karma Sadakhy, the final phase in the order of

pure creation, manifesting in the form of the Sivalinga.

Karma Sadakhy is also the beginning phase in the order of non-transcendental creation. It is the repository for the group of transcendental tattvas, such as Paranada, Parabindu, Aparanada and Aparabindu. At the same time, it is the source for the evolution of 36 tattvas leading to this physical level. It is in Karma Sadakhy that the mani-

ATTRIBUTES OF PANCHABRAHMA

Name	Meaning of Name	Deputed Lord	Power	Related Kalā	Sphere	Direction	Syllable	Color
Sadyojāta	quickly birthing	Brahmā	creation	Nivrittikalā	earth	west	Na	white
Vāmadeva	pleasing	Vishnu	preservation	Pratishthākalā	water	north	Ma	saffron
Aghora	non-terrifying	Rudra	dissolution	Vidyākalā	fire	south	Śi	blue-black
Tatpurusha	supreme soul	Maheśvara	obscuration	Śāntikalā	air	east	Vā	gold
Īśāna	ruler	Sadāśiva	revelment	Śāntyatitakalā	ākāśa	upward	Ya	crystal



4. Tatpurusha ("supreme soul"), the controlling Lord of Maheshvara, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of obscuration. His direction is east, He is related to the sphere of air (*vayu mandala*), and His Panchakshara Mantra syllable is *Va*. The Agamas describe Tatpurusha Deva as gold in color, dressed in yellow silken cloth, head adorned with a crown and crescent moon. In one hand he holds a string of beads and in another His trident staff.

Tatpurusha's planted foot symbolizes veiling grace.



4. Tatpurusha: Siva's Power of Obscuration



festation of Panchabrahma is taking place. The order of such manifestation is explained now.

Tattva, Murti, Prabhava

Before introducing the process of manifestation of five great Lords (Ishana and others), it is essential to know about three categories: *tattva*, *murti* and *prabhava*.

The five Sadakhyas come under the category of *tattva*. *Tattva* means that which is existing from the time of creation, operating in an orderly way, and which is absorbed into its source at the time of final dissolution.

In the category of *murti*, there are five—Sivatara, Isha, Brahmisha, Ishvara and Vyomesha. Who are these murtis? Where do they come from? [Note: In the *Agamas*, Sivatara is more often called Sadasiva, and Vyomesha is known as Ishana.] These five murtis manifest along with the five Sadakhyas from the same source, but they remain latent within the Sadakhyas.

Sivatara lies latent within Siva Sadakhy. (Parashakti is dominant in Siva Sadakhy, and Anashrita [Siva aspect] is dominant in Sadasiva.) Likewise, Isha lies latent within Amurti Sadakhy. (Adishakti is dominant in Amurti Sadakhy, and Anatha is dominant in Isha.) Brahmisha lies latent within Murti Sadakhy. (Icchashakti is dominant in Murti Sadakhy, and Ananta is dominant in Brahmisha.) Ishvara lies hidden within Kartru Sadakhy. (Jnanashakti is dominant in Kartru Sadakhy, and Vyomarupa is dominant in Ishvara.) Vyomesha lies hidden within Karma Sadakhy. (Kriyashakti is dominant in Karma Sadakhy, and Vyapaka is dominant in Vyomesha.)

On the upper portion of the Sivalinga, Sivatara is present. Isha is on

the west, Brahmisha on the north, Ishvara on the south and Vyomesha on the west.

Prabhava is the category of Panchabrahma (five-fold God), or Sadasiva, which comes into existence upon the union of *tattva* (Shakti aspect) and *murti* (Siva aspect).

Panchabrahma

The union of Siva Sadakhy and Sivatara results in the appearance of Ishana. The union of Amurti Sadakhy and Isha gives rise to Sadyojata. The union of Murti Sadakhy and Brahmisha results in the manifestation of Vamadeva. The union of Kartru Sadakhy and Ishvara gives rise to Aghora. The union of Karma Sadakhy and Vyomesha results in the manifestation of Tatpurusha. All these manifestations are taking place in the Karma Sadakhy, which contains all prior levels of devolution.

Ishana is the source of spontaneous grace directed to all beings and to all worlds. It is beyond all systems and disciplines, unexcelable and unsurpassable, without limit or boundary.

Tatpurusha is the all-pervasive power that sustains the bodies of human beings, celestial beings, asuras, animals, birds and so forth, that which fills up and regulates the entire range of worlds, spreading out everywhere through *nada* arising from *bindu*.

Aghora is pure consciousness (Sivajnana), always calm and tranquil. It is the force that opposes the dreaded phenomenon of repeated birth and death, remaining ever aware in consciousness.

Vamadeva is the absolute power of knowing all and doing all, the force which keeps embodied souls engaged in activities to work out their karmas. It is the subtle and secret power, the luminosity of Siva,

Panchabrahma in Shaktism & Vaishnavism

The five Panchabrahma murtis are found not only in Saivism, but also in Shaktism and Vaishnavism. They are portrayed in various forms depending on the tradition one follows. The *Saiva Agamas* depict them as: 1) Sadyojata, 2) Vamadeva, 3) Aghora, 4) Tatpurusha and 5) Ishana. In the Shakta tradition they are: 1) Brahma, 2) Vishnu, 3) Rudra, 4) Ishvara and 5) Sadasiva. In the *Vaishnava Agamas*, they are named: 1) Vasudeva, 2) Samkarshana, 3) Pradyumna, 4) Aniruddha and 5) Narayana.

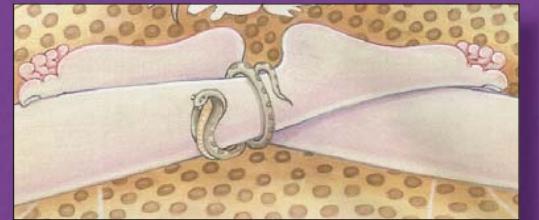
The concept of Panchabrahma in the Shakta school of thought could be best summarized by the most revered text of

the Sri Vidya tradition, *Sri Lalitha Rahasya Sahasranamam*, the thousand names of Lalita Mahatripurasundari. Names 249 and 250 are Panchapretasanasena and Panchabramaswarupini. The meaning is that Sri Lalitha, seated on Her throne consisting of the Panchapretas, or five lifeless bodies (the five elements), is responsible for bringing existence to these Panchabrahmas through the infusion of Herself, the Shakti (pure energy).

Scientifically, it is understood that everything in the universe is made up of two things: matter and energy. Matter represents Siva and energy represents

Shakti, and it is through this mergence that the manifestation of this universe exists. In Shaktism, the Panchabrahmas are responsible for the execution of the *panchakrityas*, or five-fold acts: 1) *srishti*, creation of the universe; 2) *sthithi*, sustenance of the universe; 3) *samhara*, destruction of the universe; 4) *tirodhana*, concealment; and 5) *anugraha*, absorbing the soul into infinite bliss. Understanding this, the aspirant must acknowledge that in order for life to continue, Siva can never be separated from Shakti; so we realize and revere Her as Panchabramaswarupini.

Janahan Balasingham



Ishana's holy feet symbolize revealing grace.

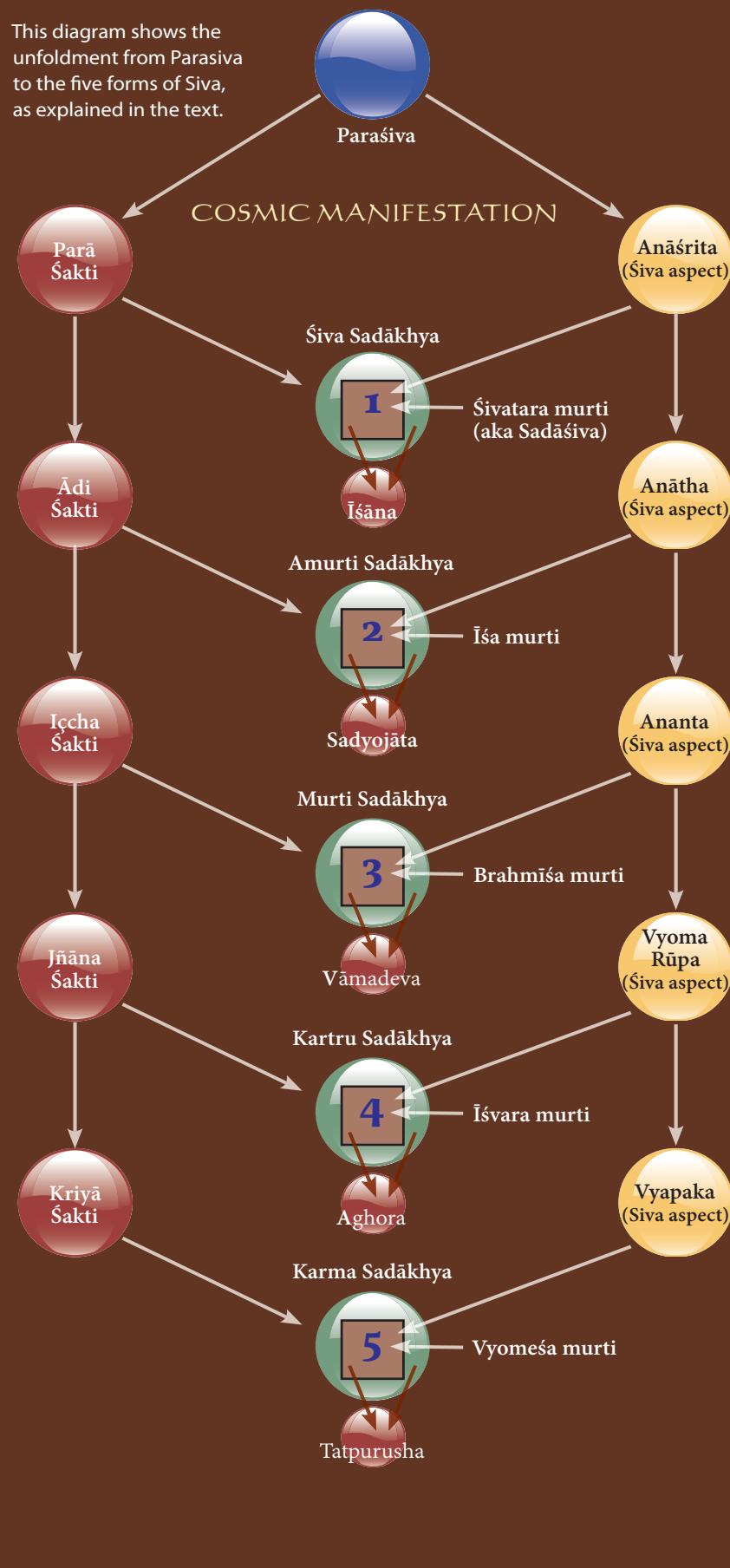
5. Ishana ("ruler"), the controlling Lord of Sadasiva, is the aspect of Siva that wields the power of revealment. His direction is upward, He is related to the sphere of ether (*akasha mandala*), and His Panchakshara Mantra syllable is *Ya*. The *Agamas* describe Ishana Deva as pure crystal in color, with three eyes. In one hand He holds a trident and in another a string of beads. His two other hands present the *abhaya* ("fear not") and *dhyana* (meditation mudras). Bearing a crescent on His crown, His form is charged with benevolence.



5. Ishana: Siva's Power of Revealment



This diagram shows the unfoldment from Parasiva to the five forms of Siva, as explained in the text.



that enables embodied souls to experience dharma, artha and kama.

Sadyojata is the power that, by its mere will, assumes innumerable forms quickly and instantaneously creates relevant bodies for souls and relevant mantra-forms for competent yogis.

Sadasiva Linga— The Formless and the Formed State

The Sivalinga enshrined in the sanctum sanctorum is actually the form of Karma Sadakhy. The formless and transcendental Parasiva occupies this Sivalinga in the form of Sadasiva, or the Panchabrahma. The Agamas provide this description: "Sadasiva appears with five faces: Ishana, Tatpurusha, Aghora, Vamadeva and Sadyojata. The Ishana face, crystal in color, is at the top, looking upward. Tatpurusha, whitish-yellow, is turned eastward. Aghora, blue-black in color, is turned south. Vamadeva, of saffron hue, looks north. Sadyojata, colored like the moon's rays, looks west. The overall form of Sadasiva is the color of crystal. Each face has three eyes. The five heads are adorned with a crescent moon and locks of matted hair bound together with serpents."

Five Mantras that Constitute the Form of Sadasiva

In addition to the five faces, the Panchabrahmas also assume the form of five mantras to constitute all other parts of Sadasiva's body—heads, chest, shoulders, legs and so on. Each mantra is associated with vibrant shaktis known as kalas (pronounced *kalas*).

At this stage, Ishana becomes the mantra *Ishana Murdha*. Ishana marks the ultimate limit or boundary; hence Ishana Mantra is considered to constitute the heads of Sadasiva, the upper limit of the form. *Murdha* means head.

Tatpurusha becomes the mantra *Tatpurusha Vaktra*, constituting the five faces of the Lord. The term *vaktra* means to protect and to drive away. This mantra protects the bodies of all beings by bestowing knowledge and warding off the fear of future birth and death.

Aghora becomes the mantra *Aghora Hridaya*. It constitutes the heart, chest and related parts of the form. In this context, *hridaya* means supreme consciousness. This mantra metes out an antidote to the dreadful (*ghora*) phenomenon of repeated birth and death; thus it is known as aghora, meaning non-dreadful, tranquil and calm.

Vamadeva becomes the mantra *Vamadeva Guhya*. By nature, Vama is secret and unseen (*guhya*), the power of knowing and doing. It maintains progeny and related activities. *Vama*, meaning beautiful, also means base or inferior. The experiences of dharma, artha and kama are inferior to liberation. Vamadeva mantra enables souls to undergo lesser experiences in order to nullify their karmic merits and demerits. This mantra is considered to constitute the private parts (*guhya*) of the body—the hips and other lower regions.

Sadyojata becomes the mantra *Sadyojata Murtta* (*murtta* meaning form). Sadyojata is capable of assuming innumerable forms quickly, pervading and spreading. For this, feet are necessary. Not only feet, but the whole form is required to move. Thus Sadyojata mantra constitutes the limbs of the body.

Panchabrahma and the Five Deputed Lords: Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara and Sadasiva

For the Supreme Lord Parasiva, the main purpose of descending to the level of Karma Sadakhy is to perform the cosmic activities within the realm of pure maya. He does this through His form of Lord Sadasiva (or Panchabrahma). The five cosmic activities are: creation, maintenance, dissolution, concealment and bestowal of grace. Siva's power of creation is Sadyojata. The power of dissolution is Aghora. Tatpurusha is Siva's power to veil the soul's inherent nature (of Pure Consciousness and its infinite power of knowledge and action). Siva's power of revealing grace is Ishana. The *Vedas* and the *Agamas* are revealed through the five faces of Sadasiva.

Sadasiva exists at the extremely rarefied stratum of pure maya (the causal plane) and therefore cannot be directly involved with impure maya (the astral and physical realms). So, He performs the five actions in these realms through five Deputed Lords (Adhishtita, also known as Karaneshvara): Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara and *Sadasiva*. [Note: The Deputed Lord *Sadasiva* is set in italics to distinguish it from Sadasiva, the synonym for Panchabrahma.]

So, the cosmic process of hypostasis takes place and directly from Karma Sadakhy arises *Sadasiva*, the first deputed Lord, and then Maheshvara (as one thousandth part). From Maheshvara arise Rudra (one thousandth part), Vishnu (one 10 millionth part) and Brahma (one 10 millionth part).

THE PANCHABRAHMA VEDA MANTRA

One of the greatest and most sacred of all mantras, the Pañchabrahma Mantrāṇī, is found in the Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda, Taittirīya Āranyaka 10.17-21. Here its five verses are cited in reverse order (21 to 17), just as they are chanted during puja. This is a lucid translation by Sabharathnam Sivacharyar, based on the 12th-century translation by Ugrajyoti Sivacharyar in his priestly manual *Vedarthā Nirṇaya Manjari*, giving the enhanced meaning of the mantras in the context of the *Saiva Agamas*.

ईशानस्सर्वविद्यानां ईश्वरस्सर्वभूतानां
ब्रह्माधिपतिब्रह्मणोऽधिपतिब्रह्माशिवो मे
अस्तु सदाशिवोम् ।

īśānassarva vidyānām īśvaras sarva bhūtānām
brahmādhipatir brahmaṇoऽdhipatir brahmā
śivo me astu sadāśivom

Lord Ishana—the Supreme Lord and Revealer of all knowledge and spiritual disciplines, the nourisher and controller of all living beings, the Directing Lord of Sadasiva, He who is the guiding and directing authority for the eight Vidyeshvaras, who directs Brahma, Vishnu and others—may He present Himself in this Sivalinga. By such benign presence, let there occur absolute purity and auspiciousness in me. Om.

तत्पुरुषाय विद्वाहे महादेवाय धीमहि
तत्त्वो रुद्रः प्रचोदयात् ।

tatpurushāya vidmahe mahādevāya dhīmahi
tatto rudraḥ prachodayāt

As guided by my guru, I realize the form of Siva known as Tatpurusha. I meditate with pure mind and refined intellect on the Great Illuminator. Let Tatpurusha—who cuts asunder the limiting bonds of the souls and by this act comes to be known as Rudra—guide, enlighten and strengthen my organs of knowledge and action and my internal faculties.

अघोरेभ्योथगोरेभ्यो घोरघोरतरेभ्यः
सर्वेभ्यस्सर्वं सर्वेभ्यो नमस्तेऽस्तु रुद्ररूपेभ्यः ।

aghorebhyo thogorebhyo ghora ghoretabhoyah
sarvebhyaḥ sarvasarvebhyo namaste astu rudrarūpebhyaḥ

Salutations to Lord Siva who manifests Himself in countless benign forms, in frightful and terrifying forms, and to all those countless forms of Rudra (eulogized in the Sri Rudram hymn). Salutations to all such manifestations of Lord Siva.

वामदेवाय नमो ज्येष्ठाय नमः श्रेष्ठाय नमो रुद्राय नमः
कालायनमः कलविकरणाय नमो बलविकरणाय नमो
बलाय नमो बलप्रमथनाय नमस्सर्वभूतदमनाय
नमो मनोन्मनाय नमः ।

vāmadevāya namo jyeshthāya namah śreshthāya namo rudrāya
namah kālāya namah kalavikaranāya namo balavikaranāya namo
balāya namo balapramathanāya namas sarvabhūta damanāya
namo manonmanāya namah

Salutations to the luminous Lord who sportively creates everything. Salutations to the One who is eternally the Eldest, transcending the great cycles of time. Salutations to the One whose lordship excels all other Gods. Salutations to the One who wards off the sufferings of all living beings. Salutations to the One who is Eternal Time. Salutations to the One who sets into operation the divisions of time and maintains the worlds in an orderly way. Salutations to the One who, being the source of strength, strengthens the auspicious forces. Salutations to the One who, being the wielder of strength, withdraws the strength of inauspicious forces and extirpates them. Salutations to the One who guides all souls to ultimately reach Him.

सद्योजातं प्रपद्यामि सद्योजाताय वै नमो नमः ।
भवे भवेनातिभवे भवस्वमां भवोद्भवायनमः ॥

sadyojātām prapadyāmi sadyojātāya vai namo namah
bhave bhavenātibhavē bhavasva mām bhavodbhavāya namah

I submit my mind, speech and body totally and repeatedly to Lord Sadyojata, who manifests Himself and instantaneously creates bodies and worlds, who appears to devotees in the forms contemplated by them and yet transcends such forms assumed by Him and who has a retinue of Deities formed of millions of mantras. May He make my form as of His own form.



Brahma is deputed for the activity of creation under the direction of Sadyojata, its Controlling Lord (*Adhishtatu*); Vishnu protects as directed by Vamadeva; Rudra reabsorbs as directed by Aghora; Māheshvara conceals as directed by Tatpurusha; *Sadasiva* bestows grace as directed by Ishana.

Adho Mukha, the Sixth Face

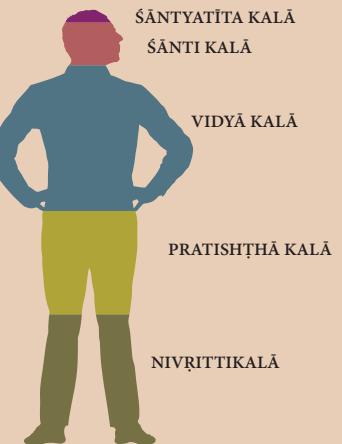
In addition to the five faces of *Sadasiva*, there is a sixth face named *Adho Mukha*, which manifests out of a sixth *Sadakhya*, *Maha Sadakhya*, and looks downward. A pleasant blue color and located at the neck of the Lord, it is associated with *Sri Nilakantha*, the blue-throated Lord. Most of the esoteric meanings of *Aum*, the *Pranava*, are connected to *Adho Mukha*. It is identical with the space of supreme consciousness (*chidakasha*) and generates five levels of *akasha*. *Adho Mukha* has its role and presence in the form of Lord Skanda.

ESOTERICS OF THE SIVALINGA

TATTVAS		Paraśiva (atattva)	Absolute Reality, beyond time, form and space.
1-2	Śāntyatīta Kalā (for which Īśāna is the Controlling Lord via <i>Sadāśiva</i>)		“Sphere beyond peace,” the rarefied sphere of śuddha māyā (actinic energy), superconscious, endless inner space, the realm of God Śiva and the Gods
3-5	Śānti Kalā (for which Tatpurusha is the Controlling Lord via <i>Maheśvara</i>)		“Sphere of peace,” the level within śuddha māyā where forms are made of inner sounds and colors, where reside great devas and rishis who are beyond the reincarnation cycles
6-13	Vidyā Kalā (for which Aghora is the Controlling Lord via <i>Rudra</i>)		“Sphere of knowing,” the level within śuddha-aśuddha māyā (actinodic energy) of subsuperconscious awareness of forms in their totality in progressive states of manifestation
14-35	Pratishthā Kalā (for which Vāmadeva is the Controlling Lord via <i>Vishnu</i>)		“Sphere of resting, tranquility,” the level within aśuddha māyā (odic energy) of intellect and instinct
36	Nivṛittikalā (for which Sadyojāta is the Controlling Lord via <i>Brahmā</i>)		“Sphere of perdition, destruction; returning,” the level within aśuddha māyā of physical and near-physical existence, conscious, subconscious and sub-subconscious mind

The Sivalinga is the primary *murti*, or symbol, of Siva, enshrined in nearly every one of the tens of thousands of Siva temples and shrines around the globe. It is the simplest and most ancient symbol of God. Lingas are usually of stone, carved or naturally existing, such as shaped by a swift-flowing river, but may also be of metal, precious gems, crystal, wood, sand, earth or transitory materials such as ice. During puja, the pujari (officiant), chants specific mantras and performs various mudras (hand gestures) and visualizations to enliven the Linga as the vessel through which the Deity may manifest and give blessings. The methodology and meaning of these rites are given in the *Saiva Agamas* and supplementary texts. The entrance of Divine energies into the Linga is visualized as coming from above, and each part of the Linga represents a certain stratum of consciousness or plane of existence. These strata, called *kalas*, give rise to the 36 tattvas. Their location and their relationship to the Panchabrahma mantras are shown in the table above. During puja, the Linga is seen as a microcosmic representation of the universe.

The *kalas* (primary hierarchical divisions of the cosmos) are correlated to the human body as shown in the illustration to the right.



Sadasiva in Temple Worship Rites

During the puja, the priest visualizes the form and limbs of the Deity while chanting the respective five Panchabrahma Mantras three times. Perhaps the most significant instance is the invocation of the Divine presence into the Sivalinga: Ishana corresponding to the head; Tatpurusha, the face; Aghora the heart and chest; Vamadeva, the hips and other lower regions; and Sadyojata, the limbs. While chanting each mantra, the priest touches the corresponding place on the Sivalinga, from the top down to the base of the pedestal. Following that, the priest visualizes the corresponding five *kalas* while chanting and invoking them into the parts of the Sivalinga. Thus, during puja, the Sivalinga serves as a microcosm into which is poured the macrocosm in all of its dimensions of existence.

Next the priest again chants the five mantras while offering flowers in worship of the various parts of the body of *Sadasiva* and then to the five aspects, or faces, of *Sadasiva* in association with the five *krityas*, cosmic actions or powers. The five *krityas* and corre-

sponding Panchabrahmas are 1) *srishti*, creation, Sadyojata 2) *stithi*, preservation, Vamadeva; 3) *samhara*, dissolution, Aghora; 4) *tirobhava*, concealing grace, Tatpurusha; 5) *anugraha*, revealing grace, Ishana.

For the final arati, a profound mantra from the *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, known as the Panchabrahma Veda Mantra (see p. 49), is chanted to invoke the five aspects of *Sadasiva* into each of the five flames while offering the arati lamp before the Sivalinga.

Conclusion

Congratulations! The *Agamas* themselves contain a disclaimer for this arcane discussion: “This is the ultimate subject. There is no subject superior to this. Since it is ultimate, it cannot be understood by the uninitiated. Even for the initiated, there is no *sadhana* superior to understanding this ultimate subject. It is actually a great *tapas* (austerity) to meditate on this ultimate subject.” *Vatula Agama*, *Tattvasara* *Patala*, 252–254

HOW WORSHIP OF THE LINGA BENEFITS ALL BEINGS

The Sivalinga consists of two major parts, the upper, cylindrical portion, called *puja bhaga*, and the pedestal in which it rests, known as *pitha bhaga*. The *puja bhaga* has two sections, or “seats,” (*asanas*): *vimalasana* and *padmasana*. In the pedestal, there are three seats, *yogasana*, *simhāsana* and *anantāsana*.

Anantāsana is visualized as triangular in form and corresponds to the sphere of earth. *Simhasana* is square and corresponds to the sphere of water; *yogasana* is octagonal and corresponds to the sphere of fire; *padmasana*, circular, corresponds to the sphere of air; and *vimalasana*, hexagonal, corresponds to the sphere of ether (space).

During temple puja, Lord Siva successively occupies these five seats. He resides in yo-

gasana during the invocation (*avahana*). He occupies *simhasana* during the ceremonial ablutions (*snana*). He is present in *padmasana* during the various offerings of flowers, incense, light, etc. He occupies *vimalasana* while food is offered. He resides in *anantāsana* while being praised and honored through chanting, singing, music and dance.

How are all beings benefited by such worship? On a subtle level, the body of each group of beings is invested with a fiery seed with a particular geometrical form. For humans, the seed is triangular. For animals, it is square. For birds, it is circular. For all crawling beings, it is hexagonal. For beings born of vapor (*svedaja*) and for plants, it is octagonal.

The blessings of Sivalinga worship reach each group of beings through its fiery seed

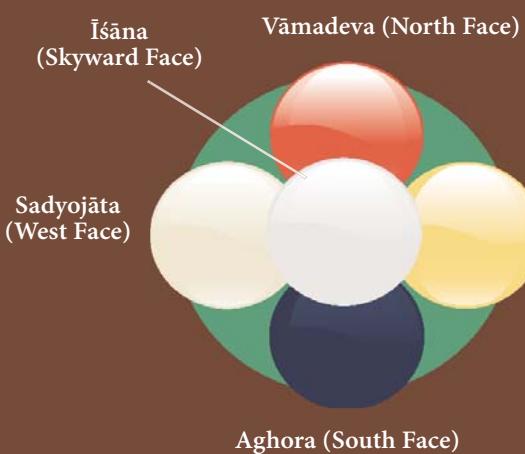
during the time Lord Siva occupies the asana having the corresponding geometric shape. Thus, animals are benefited through *simhasana* during the ritual ablutions; humans are benefited through *anantāsana* during the honoring, and so on, as shown in the table below.

Excepted from the *Saiva Agamas* by Sabharathnam Sivacharyar



	Seat (Asana)	Shape	Part of Puja	Group of Beings	Sphere
upper Linga (pūjā bhaga)	vimalāsana	hexagonal	offering of food	crawling beings	ether
	padmāsana	circular	offering of incense, etc.	birds	air
pedestal (pīṭha bhaga)	yogāsana	octagonal	invocation	trees, plants, etc.	fire
	simhāsana	square	ablutions	animals	water
	anantāsana	triangular	honoring	humans	earth

FIVE DIRECTIONS, A VIEW FROM ABOVE



The diagram at left shows the position of Siva’s five faces on the upper portion of the Sivalinga particularly for east-facing temples. The Agamas allow for a rotation of the faces for temples facing other directions. For example, Tatpurusha may be considered to face west in a west-facing temple.

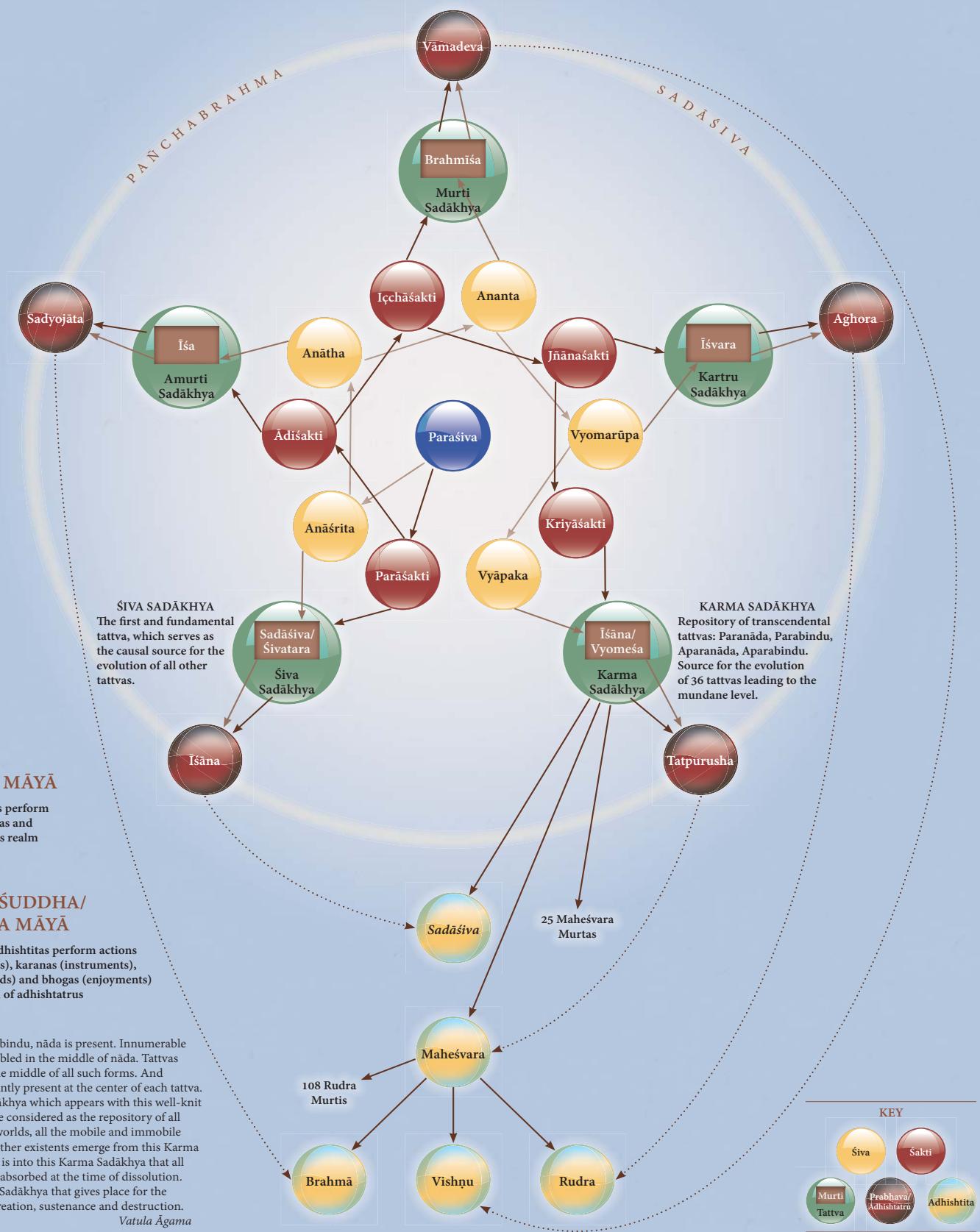
Tatpurusha (East Face)

The photo at right is a Sivalinga from Nepal (on display at the San Francisco Metropolitan Museum of Art) in which the five faces of Siva are carved in the stone. The fifth face, Ishana, not carved, would face upward. Note that the base (which would have been encased in a pedestal) begins as a square, then transitions to eight sides, then to a circle, as is traditional.





DIVINE MANIFESTATION ACCORDING TO THE SAIVA AGAMAS



YOUTH

Embracing Hinduism, My Way

Eagerly confronting my elders with challenging questions turned out to be the most important skill I learned on my path of religious discovery

BY APOORVA MURTHY

If I had relied on the authority of every book I read, followed every custom I was told was important or blindly listened to every wise person I encountered, I can confidently say I would have been spiritually walking backwards. Not to mention I would have been left utterly confused.

Let me explain. I grew up in a very traditional, very religious, very Hindu household. And like (almost) any other teenager, pushing my mother's buttons was a hobby—one I excelled at, might I add. I constantly questioned the things she asked me to do. Why should I pray out loud when I can do it just the same in my head? And what does this prayer mean anyway? Reincarnation? Do you have any proof? Why is it okay for Draupadi to have five husbands? That's ridiculous. And don't get me started on attaching an elephant head and resurrecting someone who was beheaded. What happened to the part where we're not supposed to kill animals?

My mom probably recalls those days with frustration and can breathe a partial sigh of relief now, many years later, knowing that I didn't stray too far from the path she wanted me to walk. I will admit that, initially, those questions were simply to render my mom speechless, leaving her without a retort so I could walk away victorious and never have to wake up early on Sunday to sit for prayers.

But she was never speechless, at least not permanently. She would always come back with an answer, and if she didn't have an answer, she would direct me to where I could find one. She would suggest books, telling me I could read on my own if I didn't believe her; she would tell me to talk to such-and-such Uncle or so-and-so Swamiji who knew much more than she did.

Looking back, my mom's frustration was my growth. My questions were initially answerable. When I realized they were too easy for her, I began crafting better ones, questions with layers. When even those returned responses, I knew I had to change my strategy. I needed a base, a strong foundation upon which to build my questions.

I started reading more; I started going out of my way to find satisfactory answers. The more I read and the more I learned, the more questions I had. The more questions I had, the more my interest grew. I no longer questioned just for the sake of questioning, but to provide myself with a trajectory to learn more.

That's how I came to finally appreciate what I was surrounded by growing up: the fact that I could question texts, ideas, people, and still never be termed a blasphemer. In fact, as I later learned, some of Hinduism's first texts featured just that: questions and answers (and

those "answers" were frequently counter-questions), conversation between individuals, explanation, interpretation, more questions, more dialogue.

As we progressed through grade school in America, our schooling shifted from teachers giving us answers to teachers teaching us how to ask questions. It was tedious at times, but now I see the value of the exercises we went through. We learned how to think analytically—how to synthesize facts and details to discover ideas and themes, and then, using this as a base, we could formulate questions for discussion, interpretation and analysis.

Learning how to critically and effectively question is an indispensable skill that I began developing early on. I challenged my parents with my questioning, but, more importantly, they challenged me back with their responses. I didn't have the most-liked English teacher, but she forced us to change our approach to the material presented, to take ownership of the texts she assigned.

As a medical student, I can surely attest to the importance of memorizing information to establish a solid foundation. We have acronyms, shortcuts and now apps to help us. But being able to recall such information is only "step one" in the process of arriving at a diagnosis. We learn pattern recognition, but rarely do we encounter a "textbook case." In fact—and we are told this daily—learning to ask the right questions is, by far, the most important skill we have to develop as future clinicians. Applying the knowledge we have, rather than simply recalling it.

Can (and should) this same principle, stressed throughout grade school, undergraduate, graduate and professional school be applied to our spiritual development as well?

Questioning one's faith in order to grow spiritually may seem counter-intuitive, but for me it was crucial. Luckily, I grew up in an environment that encouraged debate and inquisition in all planes of learning. My mom was my first spiritual teacher. No, I didn't follow her path, and I probably never will. But to her surprise, and to my own, I did create a path for myself. And I could walk wherever I wanted—my own path, never before traversed.



APOORVA MURTHY, 23, is a medical student at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. She pursued a degree in Sanskrit and was involved in the Hindu Students Association branch at the University of Texas at Austin. She now focuses her spiritual pursuits on reading, blogging and volunteering at a local clinic.



L A N G U A G E

India Hosts 15th World Sanskrit Conference

The Prime Minister opens gathering of 1,200 renowned linguistic scholars

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

SANSKRIT IS THE SOUL OF INDIA," proclaimed India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in chaste Hindi as he opened the 15th World Sanskrit Conference: "Sanskrit bharat ki atma hai." His words were greeted with a standing ovation and five full minutes of sustained applause from the audience of Sanskrit lovers and scholars—one thousand from India and over two hundred from the rest of the world—packed to capacity in Delhi's prestigious Vigyan Bhavan. The by-invitation-only conference (previously held in many great cities of the world, including Paris, Leiden, Vienna, Edinburgh and Helsinki) ran from January 5 through 10, 2012.

The prime minister's inspiring endorsement made headlines throughout India and was quoted throughout the week by the eminent participants, who lived and breathed Sanskrit nearly around the clock at the two venues of the week-long gathering, Vigyan Bhavan and Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts. As it turned out, HINDUISM TODAY was one of the few publications staying

to cover the event after the PM's address—a revealing statement on the priorities of the Indian media, who might have taken greater interest in this prodigious international event in the nation's capital.

In a journalistic career spanning over two decades, this reporter has attended many big conferences, national and international. This one was a mega-event, both in scale and in intensity of participation at every turn. The conclave was sweetly enhanced by the posh venue—Vigyan Bhavan, which is use mostly for official government affairs—and by the enthusiastic presence of our prime minister. Also rare was the bipartisan support of a function with such a strong religious flavor. Though sponsored by the Congress-led government, it was equally endorsed by the Bhartiya Janata opposition party.

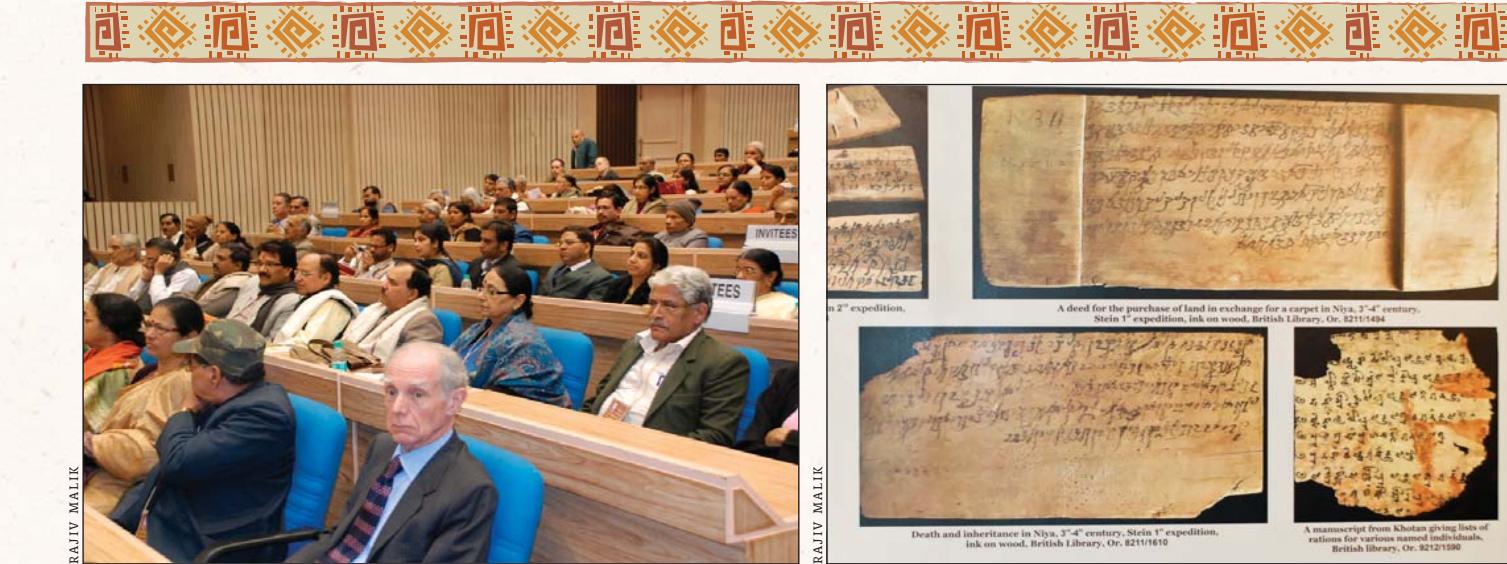
Sanskrit was the preferred language of discourse; even the international delegates were conversing in fluent Sanskrit during the deliberations and discussions in hundreds of meetings. There were twenty wide-ranging session topics: *Vedas*; linguistics; epics and *Puranas*; *Tantras* and *Agamas*; grammar;

poetry, drama and aesthetics; Sanskrit and Asian languages and literatures; Sanskrit and science; Buddhist studies; Jain studies; philosophies; religion; ritual; epigraph; Sanskrit in the technological world; modern Sanskrit literature; pandit meeting (conducted entirely in Sanskrit); poets' meeting; law and society; and manuscriptology. The sessions went on from morning to night in the various plush, high-tech halls and seminar rooms of Vigyan Bhavan, which spreads over several acres in the heart of Delhi. Delegates could be seen popping in and out of sessions, to catch at least parts of others going on simultaneously.

The first day's special lectures were held in the Bhavan's main hall, with Kapila Vatsayyan as chair. Ashok Aklujkar entitled his

Continued on page 54

Conference opening: (clockwise from above) conference chair Radhavallabh Tripathi introduces India's Prime Minister; the distinguished audience; an exhibition on Sanskrit manuscripts from central Asia; PM's opening address



From the Prime Minister: Dr. Manmohan Singh's Opening Address

I COMPLIMENT THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT and the International Association of Sanskrit Studies (IASS) for organizing this truly unique event. I also extend my very warm greetings to all the scholars who are participating in this conference and have come to Delhi from far corners of the world.

Since its inception in 1972, the IASS has been organizing the World Sanskrit Conference every three years, with three previous conferences in India. I learned that the IASS is not concerned with Sanskrit in the narrow sense but more broadly, with research work based on solid knowledge of one or more Indian languages and on fundamental textual sources from South and South-East Asia. This is indeed a most worthy cause.

Sanskrit, which is recognized as one of the oldest living languages of the world, is often misunderstood as only a language of religious hymns and rituals. Such an understanding does injustice to the great genius of this language and betrays ignorance of the work of great writers, thinkers, sages and scientists like Kautilya, Charaka, Sushruta, Aryabhata, Varahamihira, Brahmagupta, Bhaskaracharya and many others. Indeed, Sanskrit is much more than a language. It is a complete knowledge system that embodies the great learning traditions of ancient India. Jawaharlal Nehru, once described Sanskrit language and literature as "the greatest treasure that India possesses." He went on to say, "This is a magnificent inheritance; so long as this endures and influences the life of our people, so long will the basic genius of India continue to flourish."

Sanskrit has not only some of the greatest classics of world literature, but also a treasure of knowledge in mathematics, medicine, botany, chemistry, arts and humanities. If we provide the missing links and establish the required inter-disciplinary approaches, the wisdom of Sanskrit has the potential of enriching the present-day knowledge systems and Indian languages immensely.

The Sanskrit language has also been the source of values and ideals that have sustained India through the ages. Like the great civilization

of India, Sanskrit does not belong to any particular race, sect or religion. It represents a culture that is not narrow and sectarian but open, tolerant and all-embracing. The open-minded seers and thinkers who spelt out their vision and philosophy in the sacred *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* were able to balance the opposites in their life and in philosophy. It is this spirit of liberalism and tolerance imbedded in Sanskrit that we must inculcate in our present-day life. The message of the ancient sages of India, who gave us the concept of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, the world as one family, continues to be of great significance to the world even today.

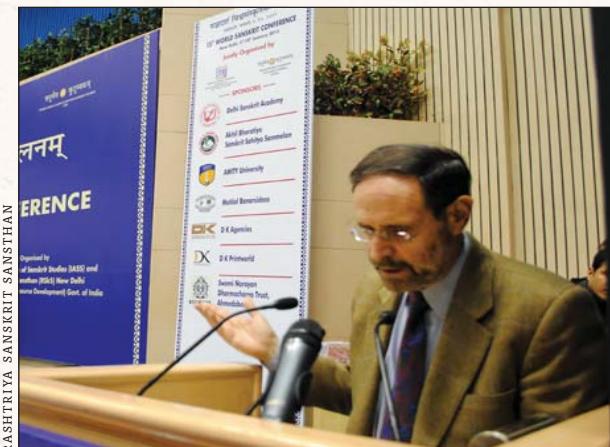
The Government of India is committed to the promotion and development of Sanskrit. Three institutions established by the government—Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth and Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth—are actively engaged in this task. It is also taking other measures to encourage the study of Sanskrit. These include financial assistance to modern schools offering Sanskrit as a subject and traditional Sanskrit schools offering modern subjects, and to voluntary organizations that are maintaining traditional Sanskrit institutions. In addition, Sanskrit departments of the universities are funded by the University Grants Commission. Financial assistance is also provided for the production of Sanskrit literature, including newspapers and journals, and reprinting of rare books. Scholars who have excelled in the study of Sanskrit are honored every year. In the course of time, we will further strengthen our efforts for the promotion, development and enrichment of Sanskrit.

Many of the modern Indian languages depend upon Sanskrit for their vocabulary. The Commission for Technical and Scientific Terms established by the Government of India has also depended on Sanskrit sources for developing the technical terms in science and technology for Indian languages. I expect that this Conference will also contribute to better translation software and other computer programs in Indian languages.



message "Reflections of an East-West Sanskritist," while scholar Lokesh Chandra addressed "Sanskrit as trans-creative dimensions in various languages, literatures and thought systems." Dr. Chandra observed, "Sanskrit has been the fountainhead of thought and belle letters, of visual and performing arts, of life and ritual, of power and virtue in Central, East and Southeast Asia. Modern life is threatened by unnatural developments. Humankind will have to find its rhymes in the deeper universes of being. Sanskrit enshrines samskaras, or values, that can illumine the tonality of the future—beyond cloning, computers and other manifestations of the technosphere."

The technical and in-depth topics, such as manuscriptology, *Tantras* and *Agamas*, were of great interest to attendees, who jumped at the chance to question the speakers. Other sessions were of wider interest. The poetry session, for instance—conducted entirely in Sanskrit—featured current topics, including a clever satire on mobile phones invoking their "omnipresence." Here the language of



the *Vedas* was used for some healthy fun and entertainment!

The session Epics and *Puranas* attracted a large audience. Of special interest was Mrs. Sushma Jatoo's presentation: "Sacred geography of Amarnath: textuality and history," in which she shared her arduous pilgrimage to Amarnath, while highlighting its geographical and historical background.

A few topics I expected to hear about (but

Conference scenes: (left) Robert Goldman, professor of Sanskrit at the University of California at Berkeley delivers thanks—in Sanskrit—to the organizers and delegates at the closing session; (right) Dr. Karan Singh and conference chair Radhavallabh Tripathi present an honorary degree to Dr. George Cardona (right), professor emeritus of linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania, an expert in Indian grammatical theory.

may have missed in the vast event) are: Sanskrit websites, Apple's open-source Devanagari font, the long-stalled Pune Sanskrit dictionary project and the remarkable experimental Indian villages where Sanskrit is the only language spoken.

Evenings featured the Festival of Sanskrit Theatre on the spacious lawn of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. Accomplished artists and troupes from all over India regaled, entertained and enthralled the assembled Sanskrit afficiandos with Sanskrit music, dance and drama. This reporter

had never witnessed so much cultural activity completely in Sanskrit medium, which included Kuivaam, Kathakali, Nagivar Kuttu, Ankiya Nat and Manipuri Rasa. The performances were shown on big digital screens across the venue so even those at the back could enjoy the color, flavor and festivity.

In addition to the theater festival, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, National Manuscript Mission and other institutions collaborated in a series of exhibitions entitled "Visvavara," with the general theme, "Biocultural survival of humanity through Sanskrit traditions."

Another big draw was a huge Sanskrit book fair at which new books on Vedic and Sanskrit literature

were released, and publishers of Sanskrit and Indology set up 70 stalls offering their recent publications for sale. The stalls did a roaring business in the evenings.

At the closing session, on January 10, guest of Honor Dr. Karan Singh, Member of Parliament and Chairperson of Indian Council for Cultural Relations, received a thundering



applause for his opening statement: "I have heard people say that Sanskrit is a dead language. But my own view is that we are alive today because of Sanskrit language." Dr. Singh expressed his serious concern for the neglect of Sanskrit in many universities due to lack of financial resources and interest.

Presiding over this last event, Mrs. Sheila

Dikshit, the Honourable Chief Minister of Delhi stated boldly that the time has come to free the Sanskrit language from universities, classrooms and academics and release it to the common people through events such as conferences, evening dramas and music festivals.

The conference was jointly organized by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan and the International Association of Sanskrit Studies. The Sansthan, fully funded by the government under the Human Resource Ministry, is a "deemed" (i.e., autonomous) university founded in 1970 to propagate, develop and encourage Sanskrit learning and research.

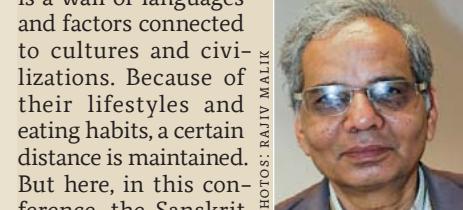
The conference was backed by India's Central Government and Delhi's administration—both led by the Congress Party. A solitary BJP (opposition party) member I spotted at the conference was totally supportive: "When it comes to the promotion of Sanskrit, we are very much with the government and organizers and congratulate them for convening this World Sanskrit Conference in such a professional manner."

Insights about the Conference

Prof. Radhavallabh Tripathi, Vice Chancellor, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan: "In the past, we had seen that the Indians who attend international conferences sometimes get overawed and unable to participate freely in a dialogue. There is a wall of languages and factors connected to cultures and civilizations. Because of their lifestyles and eating habits, a certain distance is maintained. But here, in this conference, the Sanskrit scholars of the whole

about which many Indians do not even know. Hundreds of such young people, all over the world, are today engaged in the research work connected to Sanskrit. In one of the latest areas of research, "Navya Nyaya," or "New Logic," the most work is being done in Japan. New Logic is a very technical subject which developed between the tenth and eighteenth centuries."

Dr. Dominic Goodall, French School of the Far East, Paris: "The sessions on epigraphy, the study of ancient inscriptions, were very important. It made people realize that Sanskrit was the language of a very large part of the world in the earlier centuries—Indonesia, Cambodia, South Vietnam and so forth. People change their world view a bit when they see that the world of Sanskrit is huge."



Prof. Ram Nath Jha, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, Delhi: "The most surprising and inspiring thing is that someone young based in a city located in some corner of Europe and America is working on a Sanskrit text

some just 25 years old."

Prof. Rajendra Nanavati, Former Director, Oriental Research Institute, Baroda: "I realized that a lot of work on Indian scriptures

is now being done in other countries. At times the feeling is that the scholars abroad are doing a more painstaking job than the scholars in India are doing. The interaction between our Indian scholars and the international scholars is beneficial for both."

Pankaja Ghai Kaushik, Assistant Professor of Sanskrit, Lady Sriram College, Delhi: "We cannot say that Sanskrit is an ancient language and if medicine and law were written in it, they are now outdated. At one point of time all knowledge was there only in Sanskrit language. Sanskrit offers lot of scope in terms of employment. I have not come across a single student of Sanskrit who could not find a job."

Dr. Shashi Prabha Kumar, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi: "Sanskrit is not just a language. Sanskrit is a resource. It is a medium in which so many areas of knowledge texts are stored. In this conference itself there are more than 20 sections which include grammar, language, literature, technology, philosophy, history, poetry and what not. So we should not restrict ourselves to the notion of a language. Sanskrit is different

than all other languages in that it is multidisciplinary in its own existence. So many texts in different areas and time periods are available in Sanskrit, and until today hundreds of thousands of manuscripts are lying unexplored."

Dr. Chirapat Prapandividya, Silpakorn University, Thailand: "This is one of the best conferences I have ever seen. It has provided a chance to meet with the Sanskrit scholars from all over the world and made available to us whatever they have been doing in the field of Sanskrit. The next conference is scheduled in Thailand in 2015 and we will focus more on South Asia. The message I am taking from this conference is that the study of Sanskrit will make the world peaceful, as all the teachings give the message of nonviolence."

Prof. Mrs. Shashibala, IGNCA: "Very few people know that in the ancient times people travelling from India to other countries were familiar with the Sanskrit language. In many kingdoms of central Asia, Sanskrit was the language of administration. I have displayed here how some of the legal

and administrative documents were written in Sanskrit in the 3rd century. In Cambodia, Sanskrit was the language of administration till the 14th century. Most of us do not know about the kind of prestige and place Sanskrit enjoyed during the olden times. In China there was a king who donated jewelry to a temple and recorded this transaction in Sanskrit language."

Prof. Shashi Tewari, Maitreyi College, Delhi University: "Society needs to change its attitude toward the scholars of Sanskrit. They should be treated with more respect. The Sanskrit scholar should get as much respect as the scholars of other subjects are given by the society. After all, Sanskrit has a large number of branches and infinite knowledge. Even this conference is dealing with twenty branches of Sanskrit. The way the society treats the gurus of other subjects, the same treatment should be given to a Sanskrit guru as well."



There is a small section of the society which labels Sanskrit scholars as priests and does not give them due respect."

Prof. Raja Ram Shukla, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi: "Ten years back, youth were not coming to Sanskrit. Their priorities were changing. They wanted to become engineers and doctors. Sanskrit was not being patronized during that period. But now we see the youth is getting attracted towards Sanskrit in a big way. Some follow the pure tradition of the gurukulas, which are stronger than in the recent past and



number about 50. Others learn Sanskrit in the course of a modern education. A significant change is that gaining employment is not a big issue anymore for students of Sanskrit. One area with a lot of opportunities is the sea of manuscripts which need to be edited and published. The media needs to highlight the good work being done in the field of Sanskrit. The people of the world want peace and happiness and that can be available to them through the knowledge base of Sanskrit. It will bring the whole humanity together."



TRANSITION

Preparing for Life's Last Moment

Dealing with serious disease is trial enough, but when transition is imminent, a different and often unexpected trend of events starts to unfold

BY SONIA SWEET KUMAR

I WAS REMINDED, AT TIMES, OF MY WEDDING preparations—organizing a long list of people to invite, stocking the house with disposable plates, glasses and utensils, making food arrangements, arranging sleeping accommodations for out-of-town guests, pulling old pictures out to display, arranging for a priest and devotional musicians. But this time, my family and I were preparing for another sacrament—my father's end of life and last rites.

In 1987, at age 42, my father, Suneil Kumar Gurwara, was diagnosed with brain cancer. In the years that followed, he had four surgeries, radiation and chemotherapy and was permanently on anti-seizure medication. He retired within a few years of his diagnosis due to his disabilities, which included aphasia, fatigue, nausea, double vision and imbalance. All through those years, his days were filled with hospital stays, MRIs, doctor visits, constant adjustments to his medication and managing the effects of all his medication and brain injury.

Finally, in 2005, he was diagnosed as terminal and given four to six weeks to live. From that time until his death, we endured an exhausting run of care at home, minimal privacy in our home with our supportive extended family staying with us, hospice care-workers, visitors and phone calls, while neglecting our regular duties. Amidst all this frenzy was the desire to freeze or go back in time to better days. Very quickly it was clear that a chronically ill dad had been far more acceptable than a dad who was dying.

And Yet Unprepared

Despite death's inevitability hanging so closely over us for so many years, my mother and I were still unprepared and caught off guard when my father's final diagnosis was given. Due to the effort to help him stay healthy over the years, we should have been emotionally prepared, and not surprised, when the end became imminent. And despite the years that his body had sustained the disease, his health unraveled relatively quickly at the end, much more quickly than we had expected.

An old story helps illustrate the incongruity between helping a loved one overcome a life-threatening disease or situation yet still being unprepared emotionally and not accepting the end when it arrives. One day, a young father returned home after being away at work. His wife sadly greeted him and asked, "If I had borrowed a piece of beautiful jewelry from a friend and that friend came to



claim it back, would you tell me to keep it?" "Of course not," her husband replied. "It doesn't belong to us. You must return it." "Then you must think the same of your child," his wife responded, referring to their dear son, who just succumbed to an injury from an accident.

The father's perspective based on his reply to his wife in this story is logical—we cannot keep what is not ours and should not be attached to it. But most of us slip out of this perspective when a loved one is involved and the unalterable, final decree has been handed to us. We cling and protest that there was not enough time. We feel lonely and left behind. We forget the wisdom behind the traditional Hindi expression used to communicate that someone has died, "Poore ho gayein." "The person has become complete."

Krishna's Advice

Swami Brahmarupananda of the Vedanta Center of Greater Washington DC, emphasizes having an "exit strategy" in life and points to the *Bhagavad Gita* for instruction. In Chapter Eight, in the final two lines of verse two, Arjuna asks Lord Krishna, "How are you to be known at the time of departure?" Krishna replies, "If a person remembers Me, he will reach Me."

If we practice constant recollection of God and perform all our duties as an offering to God, there is a high probability we will remember God at the time of our death. In other words, Swami Brahmarupananda explains, we are working to ensure a bright future.

My father received his final diagnosis in the hospital and was discharged to receive hospice care at home. While he was highly symptomatic of his disease, his essential self and most of his mental faculties were still intact for the first couple weeks. He remained polite and kind to all the caregivers who helped him, did not decline anybody the opportunity to meet him for a final

time and graciously accepted help and care from family members. At our request, a spiritual guide came to our home to provide my father some guidance and the opportunity to share. She asked him, "Suneilji, do you have any fears about the future?" My gurdwara-raised father responded simply, "Satnam sri whaeguru," which my mother translates as, "Hail to the all-pervading Supreme Reality whose true name eliminates spiritual darkness." Though my father was saying goodbye to so many, and his body was rapidly deteriorating, he was striving constantly to keep his mind focused where it needed to be.

Lord Krishna: "If a person remembers Me, he will reach Me."



Accepting the Inevitable

When a person is in his final weeks, days and hours, how can his family maintain an atmosphere that supports his efforts to keep his energy focused on the Divine?

When the neurologist straightforwardly but compassionately told my father, mother and me that the brain cancer had become uncontrollable, my father appeared to understand and accept. "Final stop," he said. Importantly for my father, my mother and I also accepted that diagnosis. We did not try to beat it or convince him to try one more option or see another doctor. We knew we must accept that it was time to move to the next stage. We strived for equanimity, to be comfortable and at peace.

My father's extended illness had given us many, many opportunities to reflect and work toward that mind set. When the time to prepare is short, achieving such equanimity can be much harder. One may still try to fight the illness or injury or get a third, fourth or fifth diagnosis. Some even become angry at the patient and at the disease: "How could you let this happen?" or "We'll fight this thing and bring you out on top."

However, in order to open the door and walk through to the next stage, the patient requires spiritual support. Making it known that you are there to help him through that door and not pull him back will make his preparations and transition more peaceful.

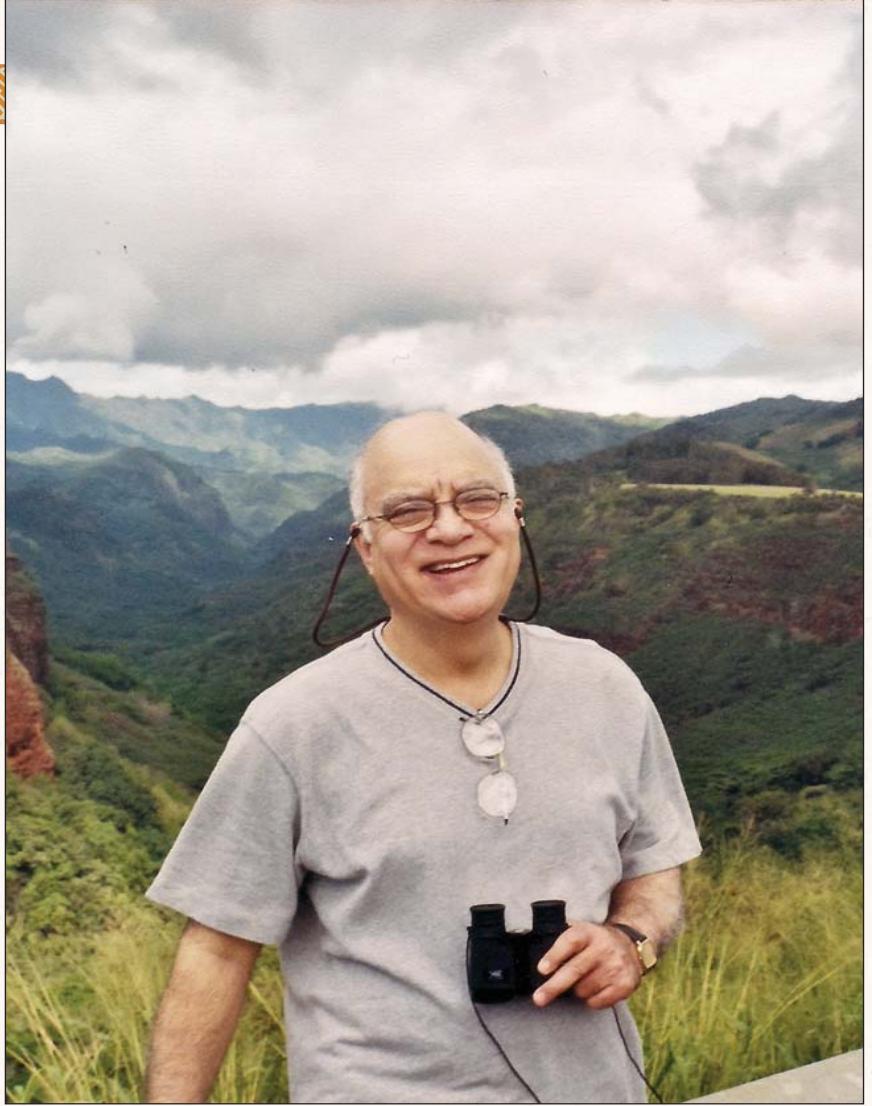
In an article titled, "Why Doctors Die Differently," Dr. Ken Murray points out that, unlike the patients they treat, doctors tend to refuse life extending measures for themselves, despite their extensive knowledge of treatment options. Their careers have taught them the limits of treatment and the essential futility of many modern life-extending measures. Their career is, in effect, a life-long meditation on such issues. They understand and accept the need to plan for the end. Denial of the inevitable is not a line of thinking for doctors, says Murray, so most opt for a graceful exit.

It is a critical time, when a terminal diagnosis has been given. If unable to let go, both the patient and accompanying family members become volatile and angry if encouraged to stop treatment and concentrate on a comfortable departure. Patient and family must be able to cut through the distractions of pinpointing causes and grasping at options. Of course, that mind set evolves over time and from within. Doctors are reminded daily of death's certainty. We, too, should reflect on the inevitable outcome of life and achieve equanimity about it now.

Visits from Friends and Family

Family from out of town came to stay with us and provide support and help, physically and emotionally. Friends also came to visit and say goodbye to my father. On some days we had many visitors, which we soon found could dramatically detract from the peaceful environment we were trying to cultivate.

Jacqueline Krock, a hospice nurse in Naperville, Illinois, recalls a patient who made a list of all the people with whom she wanted to visit before she died. Mrs. Krock wryly points out, "If you weren't on her list, too bad. She didn't have the time." Many people, Mrs. Krock says, desire to visit with a dying person for an essentially selfish purpose. They may want a connection, they may want to alleviate guilt, or they may simply feel obliged and want to avoid feeling neglectful. Mrs. Krock suggests having a "gatekeeper" who is not emotionally attached to the patient to manage traffic and politely keep certain



Suneil Kumar Gurwara: At Waimea Canyon, Kauai, in 2003. He was born in 1943 in Peshawar in undivided India and pursued a career as a research chemist.

visitors away, guiding them to help in other ways, such as doing an errand or chore for the family.

After the End

In the months following the transition, my family and I gradually established a new normalcy. Caring for a dying patient and going through the last stages is a time of high activity, distracting everyone from what is often the more difficult stage called "after," the large vacuum that used to be filled with giving care.

Swami Brahmarupananda states that Vedanta prepares us for this inevitable journey as no other knowledge does. Just as you work to help your loved one prepare for a bright future, ensure the same for yourself by remembering Krishna's instructions: as much as possible, practice constant, unbroken recollection of the Divine and do your duties as an offering to the Divine. The mother in the story reminded her husband that their son was like a jewel borrowed from the Divine. We can keep this in mind when preparing for a loved one's end of life and in continuing on with our own remaining time.

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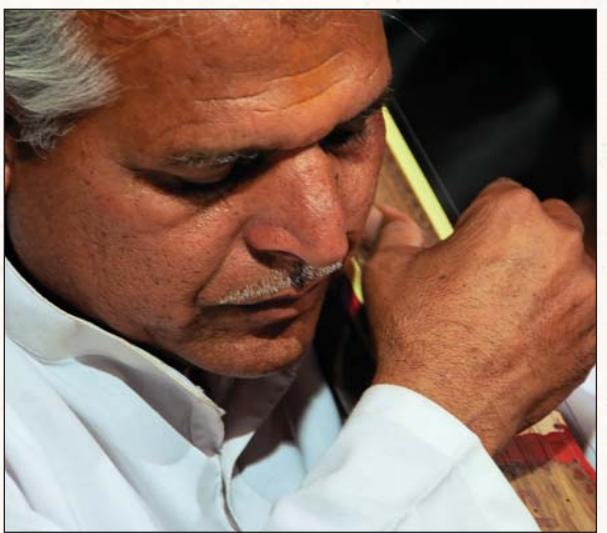
A Village Teacher Brings Kabir's Songs to Life

Prahlad Singh Tipanya is captivated by the mystic music of a 15th-century saint

BY RASHMI SAHI

IN INDORE, MADHYA PRADESH, the stage is set and the audience awaits. Center stage, a rustic-looking man dressed in kurta-pajama and a colorful turban is tuning his tambura (a five-stringed Indian musical instrument), immersed in his quest for perfection and oblivious to the chattering throngs. Finally satisfied with the strings, he alerts his fellow musicians with a glance. He plucks the strings of his tambura; the audience look up. The younger men join in on violin, harmonium and dholak (a two-headed South Indian drum). Slowly his voice rises over the accompaniment as he soulfully unleashes the ageless power of Kabir's divine Hindi verses: "Sunta nahi dhun ki khabar/anahad ka baajaa baajta." The multitude is transfixed.

Fortunately for English speakers, the famed poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) translated all of Kabir's work into English (www.sacred-texts.com/hin/sok/). Tagore rendered this verse as: "Have you not heard the tune which the unstruck music is playing? In the midst of the chamber the harp of



The voice for Kabir: Prahlad Singh Tipanya

joy is gently and sweetly played; and where is the need of going without to hear it?"

Meet Padmashree Prahlad Singh Tipanya, the inspired bhajan singer who has dedicated himself to spreading the universal message of oneness given us by Kabirdas, the fifteenth-

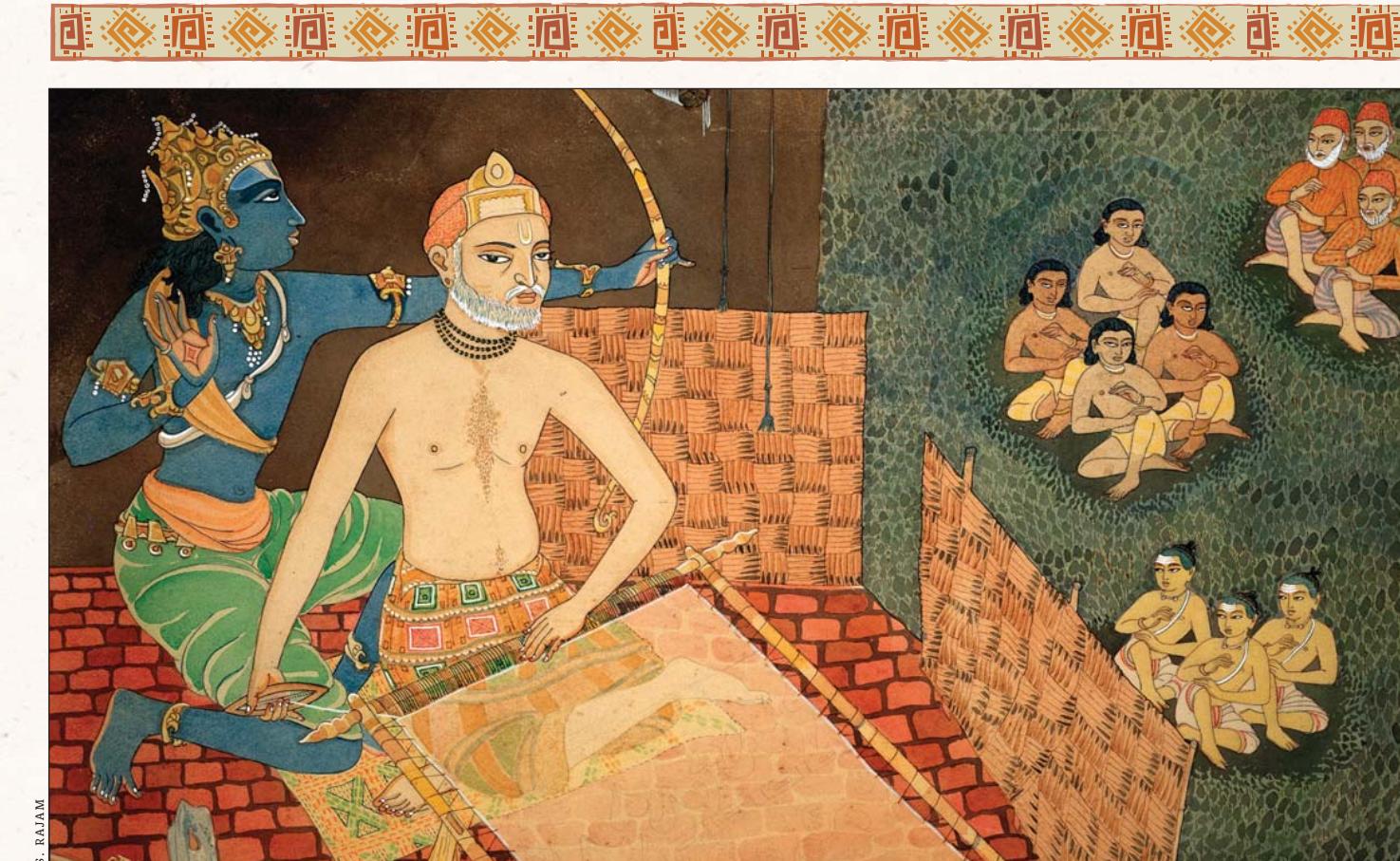
century poet-saint of North India.

Tipanya never expected to become an artist, much less an internationally respected folk singer. Employed as a government school teacher in a tiny, remote village in Madhya Pradesh, he was perfectly content with teaching science and math to his young students. But life had other plans for him.

One day in 1978, while visiting a neighboring village for the Purnima festival music gathering, he heard somebody playing tambura. Fascinated, he stayed back that evening to talk to the artist and expressed his desire to learn tambura. The artist immediately offered to teach him, advising him also to learn to sing. Overcoming his initial doubts about his voice, soon his nights were dedicated to the passion of learning tambura and singing. Joyfully he would cross the river to visit his teacher, two kilometers from his

village. His mornings were free for mundane responsibilities, and he continued teaching in the village school.

In those days, playing the tambura was not considered a respectable profession, but nothing deterred Tipanya. He believed the



tambura had a deeper meaning in Kabir's teachings. Kabir said its beautiful sounds can be heard within oneself; he saw it as a symbol for something mystically profound, writing, "O friend! This body is His lyre." In the same spirit, Tipanya declared, "Nothing can be accomplished without passion!"

Living and studying apart from his family, in a small room with his college-going brother, Tipanya made quick progress. Soon he was

performing in nearby villages; his singing was well received. In his free time, he avidly analyzed Kabir's teachings, while mindful of the poet's stern rebuke, "Mindless reading of religious scriptures doesn't help. Listen, gentlemen, this will only keep you stuck in the life-and-death cycle."

One verse in particular intrigued him: "Koi Sunta hai guru gyani gagam main, aawaz hoye jhina, jhina." Tagore translates, "Is there any wise man who will listen to that solemn music which arises in the sky? For He, the Source of all music, makes all vessels full fraught and rests in fullness Himself. He who is in the body is ever athirst, for he pursues that which is in part; but ever there wells forth deeper and deeper the sound [aawaz] 'He is this—this is He,' fusing love and renunciation into one." Purushottam Baba, a wisened musician, also engaged in the Kabir singing groups, encouraged Tipanya to find that sacred sound, "aawaz."

A student of science, Tipanya was skeptical

about anything not personally experienced. He took to meditating, and after long practice personally found that deep, inner sound that echoes, "He is this—this is He." Since that breakthrough, Tipanya has been undeterred on the path of Kabir; and he has inspired his two sons to follow in his footsteps. One son is a second vocal and plays manjira; the other plays dholak.

Pursuing this inner calling for three decades, Tipanya is now a familiar name in the oral tradition of Kabir in Central India's Malwa region. His renown has also taken him abroad to the US, UK and other countries, where he has been warmly received by a wide variety of audiences. Search for "Prahlad Tipanya" on YouTube and you will find dozens of videos of his concerts.

The contribution of this modern bard has not gone unnoticed. In 2008, he received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award, and in 2011, the Padmashree, a prestigious honor bestowed by the Government of India, for his contribution to folk art.

Tipanya's love of Kabir's teachings has led him to collaborate with Dr. Linda Hess in the Kabir Project, started in 2003 by Shabnam Virmani to better understand and propagate Kabir's simple but profound messages. Virmani was then artist-in-residence at the Shrishti School of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore; Hess is a professor of religious studies at Stanford University and a

Between two worlds: (opposite page) Tipanya (yellow kurta) in a 2008 concert in Tamil Nadu. (above) Artist S. Rajam's 1968 depiction of Kabir at his loom. In one of his poems, Kabir pleads with Lord Rama to shoot an arrow to dispel false notions that lead to discord between people. The three groups to the right, top to bottom, are gatherings of Muslims, ordinary Hindus and brahmin priests.

noted exponent of Kabir.

Fame has not jaded the humble villager. His renditions of Kabir's songs are those of a pure soul and hence touch the inner being of the listener. In a personal interview, he made this appeal to one and all: "Kabir's music is everyone's music; it is universal. Kabir's love is of devotion; and if we understand this very simple message of Kabir, then all the differences in the world will come to an end." His plea echoed Kabir's sentiments: "It is needless to ask of a saint the caste to which he belongs; for the priest, the warrior, the tradesman and all the thirty-six castes alike are seeking for God."

Rashmi Sahi (rashmi.sahi@gmail.com) is a Hong Kong-based Indian writer with a Ph.D in English literature. She loves books and culture.



LAW

How a Recent Supreme Court Ruling Impacts US Hindu Temples

The "ministerial exception" to US employment law likely applies to Hindu temple priests and hired religious teachers when considered as ministers

BY PAUL YOGANANDA DESANTIS

In this article, attorney Paul DeSantis examines in technical detail how the "Hosanna" decision applies to Hindu temples and offers suggestions from his experience on temple management.

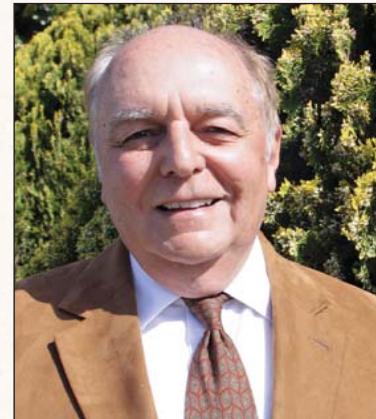
IN JANUARY, 2012, THE US SUPREME COURT issued an important First-Amendment, freedom-of-religion decision that strengthened protections for all churches, temples and other religious institutions. "Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School vs. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission" found in favor of a church in Redford, Michigan, and against its disabled church leader/employee, Cheryl Perich, as well as against the government agency responsible for protecting disabled individuals, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Beyond the issue of disability, the decision has important implications that apply to most religious institutions in the US, including Hindu temples. In brief, any employee who is considered by the organization as a "minister" may be terminated at will without triggering antidiscrimination laws.

The Case

To decide whether the Church was entitled to the "ministerial exception" from governmental disability requirements, the Court was required to answer two questions: Was Perich a minister (leader) of the Church? Yes, said all the justices. Perich was a minister/leader of the Church, which justified the Church's claim for a "ministerial exception" to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations designed to protect US disabled citizens. The second question was: What type of inquiry should the Court conduct when a religious institution claims a ministerial exception to a governmental regulation? On that question there were three different answers given by the justices, ranging from a court-ordered investigation into the Church's doctrine, to accepting at face value the claim that the person is a minister.

Why is Hosanna Important?

First, it is one of the Court's rare major Constitutional decisions in which all the justices voted in favor of the outcome, even though the majority and concurring opinions provided different reasons for their outcome. Second, Hosanna provides a carefully reasoned First-Amendment discussion, which displayed sensitivity to the needs of religious institutions to set higher standards of conduct than citizens are required to follow under civil law. One of rules at the heart of the



Lutheran Church is the "consensus" requirement, an arrangement which runs counter to common secular democratic principles where only a majority vote is required. Indeed, the US Supreme Court itself works on a majority rule basis. Third, the Hosanna First Amendment ruling applies to US Hindu organizations, giving them additional protection from state interference while performing their religious duties.

Perich taught fourth grade at the Church's school, led the students in prayer and was expected to "integrate faith into all subjects." She took courses in Lutheran theology to increase her official status from a "lay" teacher to a "called" teacher. In June, 2004, she suffered from narcolepsy and was unable to work. The Church replaced her. In January, 2005,

Perich said she was ready to return to work the following month. The Church administrator said the Church had already hired a lay teacher for the academic year. Further, the administrator did not feel she was well enough to teach again. Perich threatened to sue. The Church then dismissed Perich from her teaching post, an act thought to be within its rights because she was a "called teacher," considered by the Church as a type of minister, though she was not an ordained minister. By threatening to sue the Church, she had violated the Hosanna church rule that all "ministers" must work with the congregation to achieve consensus on major issues.

In its ruling, the Court accepted the importance of working in consensus within the Church. It also agreed that, according to their doctrine, Perich was (by virtue of her calling) a minister, not a lay employee, even though other teachers in the school were lay employees. They therefore concluded her termination was within the Church's rights. The Court pointed out, however, that their decision does not necessarily bar other types of lawsuits by a minister, such as for breach of contract or injury.

Minister: Implications of the Term

In my opinion, the most interesting aspect of this case is the concurring opinion of Justices Alita and Kagan who recognized that many religions in the US do not call their leaders "ministers." They wrote:

"The term *minister* is commonly used by many Protestant denominations to refer to members of their clergy, but the term is rarely if ever used in this way by Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists. In addition, the concept of ordination as understood by most Christian churches and by Judaism has no clear counterpart in some

UNATTRIBUTED



Christian denominations and some other religions. Because virtually every religion in the world is represented in the population of the United States, it would be a mistake if the term *minister* or the concept of ordination were viewed as central to the important issue of religious autonomy that is presented in cases like this one. Instead, courts should focus on the function performed by persons who work for religious bodies.

"The First Amendment protects the freedom of religious groups to engage in certain key religious activities, including the conducting of worship services and other religious ceremonies and rituals, as well as the critical process of communicating the faith. Accordingly, religious groups must be free to choose the personnel who are essential to the performance of these functions.

"The 'ministerial' exception should be tailored to this purpose. It should apply to any 'employee' who leads a religious organization, conducts worship services [clearly including Hindu priests] or important religious ceremonies or rituals, or serves as a messenger or teacher of its faith. If a religious group believes that the ability of such an employee to perform these key functions has been compromised, then the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom protects the group's right to remove the employee from his or her position.

"What matters in the present case is that Hosanna-Tabor [Church] believes that the religious function that respondent [Perich] performed made it essential that she abide by the doctrine of internal dispute resolution; and the civil courts are in no position to second-guess that assessment. This conclusion rests not on respondent's ordination status or her formal title, but rather on her functional status as the type of employee that a church must be free to appoint or dismiss in order to exercise the religious liberty that the First Amendment guarantees."

Applicability to Our Hindu World

I have personally helped Hindu groups form legal organizations, and assisted with contentious issues between temple managements and their priests. In some respects, the Hosanna decision leaves priests with fewer options in dealing with unfair decisions by a temple board regarding their employment. I would, however, appeal for a more enlightened handling of our temple priests, who, as this decision makes clear, are rightly regarded as ministers.

The US Supreme Court: Many important cases involving federal laws or disputes between cases are ultimately resolved here

First, I have always admired the wisdom of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of this magazine HINDUISM TODAY, in implementing a policy of decision making by consensus, not much different from that of the Hosanna Church: "My devotees abide by 'consensualocracy.' All involved in a decision must unanimously agree and obtain the guru's blessings before proceeding. No votes are taken based on the majority superseding the minority."

Second, Subramuniyaswami advocated, and I strongly support, the principle that Hindu temples in the US should put themselves under the guidance of a guru or religious leader of their tradition, specifically in times when they are unable to reach consensus on how to proceed.

In the US, the majority of temple property is owned and operated by a nonprofit corporation governed by a board of directors, usually consisting of successful local business people and professionals. Unfortunately, most Hindu temple organizations are not under the direct guidance of a religious leader. For various historical and cultural reasons, temple boards tend to have only modest respect for the priests in their employ. In contrast, in US Christian churches, the priest or minister is held in high regard and is a rightfully respected, influential member of the community.

Rather than take the Hosanna decision as an opportunity to deal less fairly with our priests, I advocate we take this moment to examine our temple management paradigm. Based upon years of experience, I believe that the most enlightened solution for any Hindu temple organization is to seek the guidance of a religious leader associated with the temple's philosophic orientation. His or her guidance may then be sought when encountering thorny issues dealing with priests, and decisions made in keeping with dharma for the betterment of the community.

PAUL YOGANANDA DESANTIS of Santa Monica, California, holds a J.D. from Georgetown University. Raised a Christian, he converted to Hinduism two decades ago. He has studied and worked with Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and is active in the Malibu Hindu Temple.

Mushrooms!

The delicious, nutritious and medicinal fungi of the forest



BY LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN, PH.D.,
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

MUSHROOMS HAVE BEEN AROUND since life originated on Earth. In fact, much of life on this planet depends on fungi, for they are the great recyclers of the forest, converting fallen plant matter into precious soil. Mushrooms' modern uses are exciting: from those that transform agricultural waste products into inexpensive but strong composite building materials that can be reused as garden mulch, to pesticidal fungi that trick insects into eating them, to mushrooms that can break down the neurotoxins used in nerve gas.

Culturally, fungi have an important history of uses. Pharaohs ate mushrooms as a delicacy. Greeks believed them to be a source of strength. The Chinese regard them as health food. There are over 14,000 types of mushrooms in the world, out of which about 3,000 are edible; and of those 700 have known medicinal properties. Around the world, we feast on fungi for their flavor, texture and nutritional and health benefits.

Mushrooms are fungi that belong to the phylum Basidiomycota. What we call a mushroom is actually the reproductive structure, or the fruiting body, of the fungus. A typical mushroom has an umbrella-shaped

cap with a stalk and gills on the underside. Caps vary widely in color and shape.

In nature, mushrooms grow wild on moist, rich soil or on the barks of trees. Mushrooms are mostly aerial except in the case of the exotic truffle, "the diamond of the kitchen," which produces an underground fruiting body. Do not go into nearby woods to collect mushrooms unless you know how to identify edible mushrooms, because a fair number of wild mushrooms are poisonous, some even deadly. The best approach is to go out mushroom hunting with a knowledgeable guide.

Edible mushrooms are readily available at

grocery stores, farmers' markets and from mushroom farms. The most popular cultivated edible mushrooms are *Agaricus bisporus*, including white, crimini and portobello. Portobello are giant—about six inches in diameter—mature crimini mushrooms. Other cultivated species include shiitake, porcini, maitake, hen-of-the-woods, oyster and enoki.

The shiitake, native to China, is known for its healing properties. Aromatic oyster mushrooms grow on fallen, dead hardwood in forests and have a scallop-shaped cap with a delicate, anise-like flavor (these can spread out to 18 inches in diameter, with thick flesh). Cultivated oyster mushroom caps come in a variety of colors: gray, blue,

yellow, pink and white. Porcini, with their earthy, nutty flavor—considered the king of edible mushrooms by the Italians—live in a symbiotic relationship with trees, very common in pine forests and chestnut woods all over the world.

The cheapest mushrooms are white and brown crimini. Truffles are the most expensive; a pound may cost a couple of thousand dollars, and a single truffle may weigh one to three pounds! One can cultivate mushrooms indoors at home, providing the right conditions. Spores and kits to grow mushrooms are commercially available.

Edible mushrooms are extensively used in cooking. You can easily incorporate them in soups, sauces, vegetable medleys, pastas, rice dishes, etc. Clean mushrooms with a soft brush prior to cooking. Never soak them in water; if you must, wipe them with a damp paper towel. Optionally, remove the stalks, which may be used for preparing stocks along with other vegetables. Fresh mushrooms do not last long in a refrigerator. Dried mushrooms can be reconstituted by soaking in hot water for ten minutes. Cook in a heavy skillet on low heat. Herbs and spices may be used to enhance flavor. Food, in addition to being nutritious, should be colorful, flavorful

and aromatic.



Edible fungi: (clockwise from left) The hand-sized portobello; the sponge-like morel; the common, white or button mushroom; North Asia's shiitake; (opposite page) the highly prized chanterelle, hunted in forests from the Northwest to the Northeast US

An Ayurvedic Perspective on Fungi

BY VAMADEVA SHASTRI, OMD,
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

SOME COUNTRIES HAVE HISTORICALLY been avid consumers of mushrooms, while others have avoided them. For example, mushrooms have been popular in continental Europe but were not used by Native Americans. India has generally avoided mushrooms, while nearby China has used them extensively.

Yogic and ayurvedic texts contain little information on fungi. They have tended to classify them as tamasic and not recommended their extensive usage as a food.

Ayurveda has recommended mushrooms as a medicine for certain conditions, however, but has not given them as much attention as other types of herbs. This situation is changing: mushrooms are gaining a new place in India's cuisine and in ayurvedic medicine.

The most commonly used Agaric species, or field mushroom (including portobello), is regarded in ayurveda as a nutritive tonic and aphrodisiac (*vajikarana*), good for reducing pitta and vata doshas but for increasing kapha dosha. It is cooling, moistening, invigorating and gives strength and vitality. It can help improve immunity and

longevity, promoting body weight.

Other types of fungi have similar properties, but there are many variations in species that must be considered. Dried mushrooms are better for kapha dosha, cooked into soups and rice dishes. Mushrooms with firmer tissue and less water, such as morel, chanterelle and shiitake, are also better for those of kapha dosha and usually provide better nutrition than the field mushroom for all doshic types. The Chinese reishi mushroom is regarded as excellent for promoting longevity. The Himalayan cordyceps is famous for its healing ability.

Ayurveda has often designated mushrooms as tamasic; they do spoil easily and can be hard to digest, particularly when the agni (digestive fire) is low. Too much of them can increase *ama* (toxins) in the body and blood, and they should be avoided when there is fever or infection. One should not take an excess of mushrooms, nor re-cook them or eat them cold. I have found mushrooms to be disturbing to some vata types who have sensitive and nervous digestive systems.

That being said, a little caution is not a rejection altogether. Even though ayurveda regards garlic as tamasic, it also considers it

a good medicine for the heart and lungs. The potential tamasic qualities of mushrooms should not make us forget their benefits. Their tamasic qualities are much less than that of meat and fish and can be compensated for, particularly by taking mushrooms more as a side dish or condiment with more sattvic food items. If one learns how to cook them properly, mushrooms can be an important addition to a healthy vegetarian diet, and can add good flavoring properties.

There are several wild mushrooms that have powerful tonic and energy-producing actions. These include the king boletus, morel, oyster and chanterelle. Many of these mushrooms grow abundantly in American forests, particularly in the Pacific Northwest and the wetter Eastern forests. Many health food stores are now carrying these as well.

Some scholars have proposed that the original Vedic soma was the *Amanita* mushroom, or fly agaric. There is no real basis for this, as the Vedic soma was a type of plant, not just one species, and the species defined are largely high mountain plants of the orchid, reed and sunflower families. Still, one cannot rule out that such a mushroom was one of the many types of soma plants!



SOCIETY

One Hindu's Take on Gay Marriage

Discrimination against homosexuals has no place in our religion, the first to teach that God is equally present in beings of all sexual orientations

BY ANANTANAND RAMBACHAN

IN NOVEMBER, MINNESOTANS WILL APPROVE OR REJECT A PROPOSED constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage. Many belonging to long-established religions in Minnesota have joined the debate over this matter. Jews and Christians, liberal and conservative, have all expressed positions.

Our state is home also to significant numbers of people of other world religions, including my own Hindu tradition. It is important that our voices also be offered in the public square. This amendment threatens to enshrine in law the perspective of particular religions and marginalize others.

There are important teachings in the Hindu tradition that affirm the equal worth of all sexual orientations. In the Hindu tradition, the value of the human person is not located in his or her sexual identity. It proceeds from the teaching that God is present equally and identically in all beings. No being is excluded, and awareness of this truth is regarded as the highest religious wisdom.

In relation to the attainment of life's highest goal, spiritual liberation, the Hindu tradition does not discriminate between heterosexuals and homosexuals. Its sacred scriptures positively mention the accessibility of liberation for gays. What stands in the way of liberation is ignorance of God existing in the heart of all beings, expressing itself in greed, violence and injustice.

One of the most remarkable statements about the inclusivity of God's love in the Hindu tradition occurs in the *Ramayana*, an ancient Sanskrit epic. The *Ramayana* tells the life story of Rama, revered by Hindus as an incarnation of God. In speaking about the nature of divine love, Rama mentions gays: "One who worships me in thought, word and action, relinquishing deceit, whether man, gay or woman is supremely dear to me."

There is good evidence that Hindu culture was one of the earliest to recognize that human sexual identity is not just heterosexual. Ancient texts refer to a third gender, different from the traditional male or female. Gender diversity is seen as part of the natural diversity of humanity and inherited at birth.

This ancient appreciation for human sexual diversity, along with the value derived from God's presence in all, must significantly inform our response to gays. Just as heterosexual persons are not called upon to justify their identities, gays should not be burdened with the obligation to explain or defend their own.

Justice, understood as equality of opportunity and treatment, is a consequence of the equal presence of God in all. This teaching is also the source of cardinal values such as noninjury, compassion and generosity. Knowledge of God's presence in all requires reverence and consideration for all beings. Hindus are called upon to identify with others in joy and sorrow, sharing their happiness and suffering.

In the case of homosexuals, it requires that we know something of the pain that comes from being demonized, ostracized and persecuted on account of their sexual identity. Homophobia, characterized as it is by fear, hate and denigration of homosexuals, finds no justifi-



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Personal rights: At a 2011 rally in Saint Paul, opponents of the amendment hold up a sign drawing a connection to a similar battle that took place over four decades ago when interracial marriage was banned in some US states prior to a 1967 Supreme Court decision

cation in Hinduism and betrays its most cherished vision and values.

The Hindu understanding of human worth and the diversity of sexual identity have direct implications for our voting choices on the proposed amendment of the Minnesota Constitution. Same-sex relationships should be recognized by the state and afforded the legal benefits and privileges granted to heterosexuals.

The public good, as understood in the Hindu tradition, is best served by our support for committed relationships that embody the values of love, loyalty, trust, care, friendship and justice. Such values are not exclusive to heterosexuals. There is no good religious argument in the Hindu tradition for supporting this amendment to the Minnesota Constitution.

THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE MARCH 7, 2012, EDITION OF THE STAR TRIBUNE OF MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA. FIND THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE AND A HOST OF COMMENTS WELL WORTH READING AT BIT.LY/GAYMARRIAGE-STARTRIBUNE

ANANTANAND RAMBACHAN, PH.D, is Chair and Professor of Religion, Philosophy and Asian Studies at Saint Olaf College, Minnesota, USA, where he has been teaching since 1985. Among his books are *Accomplishing the Accomplished*, *The Limits of Scripture*, *The Advaita Worldview: God, World and Humanity*, *The Hindu Vision and Gitamrtam: The Essential Teachings of the Bhagavadgita*.



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At the same time, HAF is alarmed at a growing trend that denies Yoga's connection with Hinduism. This misrepresentation, if left unchecked, would tear at the confidence Hindus justly derive from knowing their tradition is universally beneficial and a powerful force for good. HAF's **Take Back Yoga** campaign is dynamically working to re-establish this all-important link between Yoga and Hinduism by reaching out to yoga magazines, publishing columns and blogs, and by speaking up on radio and TV shows. Find inspiration in Take Back Yoga and reaffirm that Yoga is indeed Hinduism's beautiful gift to the world. Visit our website, and support our campaign.



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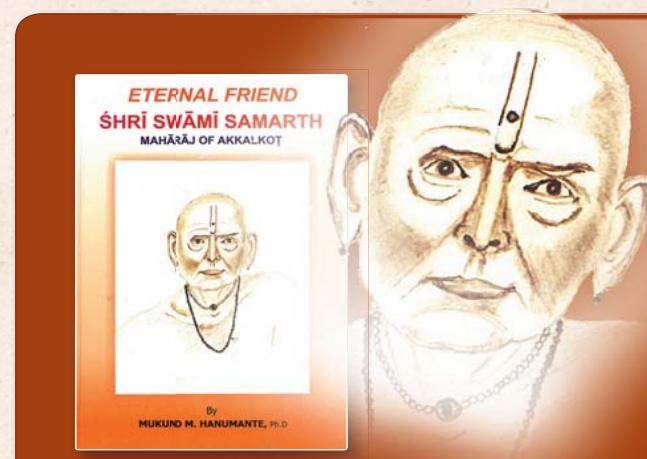
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Hindu Heritage Endowment

TALE OF TWO SIBLINGS SHOWS CHOICE OF TRUSTEE IS CRUCIAL

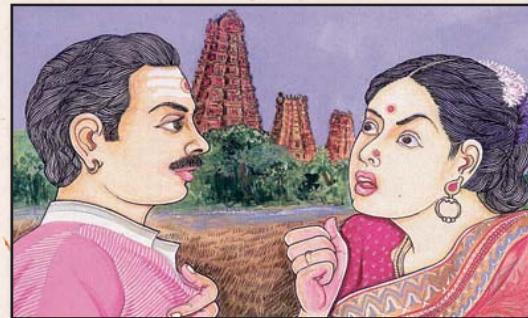
Two brothers, never very close, were surprised when their 85-year-old mother called and asked them to meet with her. She would not tell them why. "My friends at the senior center keep telling me I'm crazy not to have a living trust," she told them when they met at her aging Victorian on the edge of town. "I want you boys to help me." Amol, a hotel manager in his late fifties, lived just north of San Francisco with his wife. They had two adult children in the area. His much younger brother, Partha, a software engineer, lived alone in San Jose, in Silicon Valley. Amol, to Partha's relief, found a local estate planning attorney. In three weeks the trust was ready for their mother's signature. The two brothers were named successor co-trustees with equal powers.

All went well for three years. Then Amol, who visited his mother often, found her one weekend afternoon unable to continue a conversation. The diagnosis at the local emergency room was transient ischemic attack, a temporary lack of blood to the brain.

Shortly after they arrived at emergency, his mother was fully alert and clamoring to go home. But they spent the next five hours waiting for tests and the doctor's report. The doctor could find nothing specific, but insisted on overnight observation. The mother, discharged the next day, left fuming at being kept from her home when she had felt "perfectly fine." When Amol told Partha of the incident that afternoon, Partha asked pointedly why he hadn't been called right away. "You've kept your distance for the last twenty years, and now you want me to be your personal eye-witness news team?" Amol shot back. So it went for four more years as their mother continued to suffer fainting spells and diminished capacity. Partha regularly second-guessed his brother's decisions. Amol grew resentful of the time his mother required of him as the nearby son. Then one of Amol's children began taking what Partha thought was an unseemly interest in the value of his grandmother's estate. The damage to already tenuous family relationships was substantial. So far, the brothers have avoided taking each other to court, but just barely. Amol and Partha's story, though fictional, is a composite of true stories. Despite situations like these, estate planning attorneys continue to promote living trusts because they work so well in most cases, allowing families to handle major assets without court intervention and bypassing probate. But many living-trust boosters have tempered their enthusiasm by emphasizing the need for great care when selecting a successor trustee.

Having the love of a parent is not the sole qualification. Trustees need to have the competence to manage assets, the discipline not to consider property in a trust as theirs, the ability to cooperate with others, and the self-control to exercise fairness, honesty, respect, courtesy and good faith at times of great stress. No matter how well written your living trust is, the choice of your successor trustee remains crucial to its fulfillment.

The Hindu Heritage Endowment wants you to succeed in your estate planning efforts and, through them, both care for your family and remember good causes like the Iraivan Temple Endowment. For additional information contact Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012, ext. 244 or e-mail hhe@hindu.org.



Use care when selecting a trustee for a living trust. Otherwise, contention among family members may arise.

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1.98	Alex Ruberto	75.00
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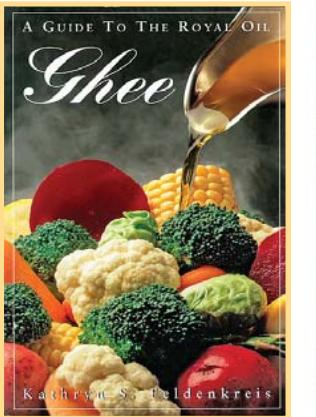
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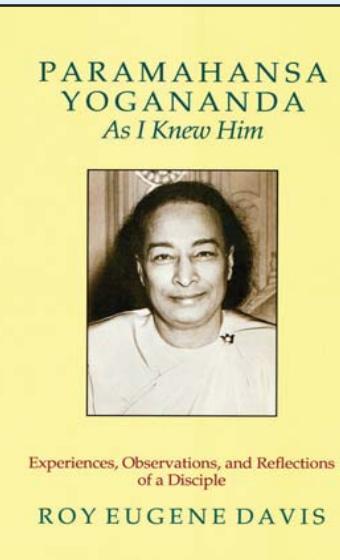


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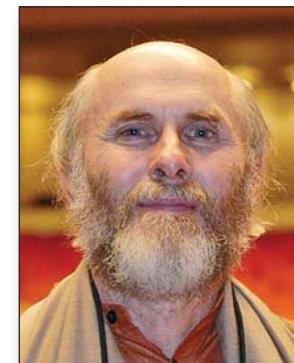


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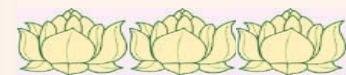


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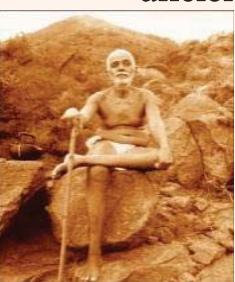
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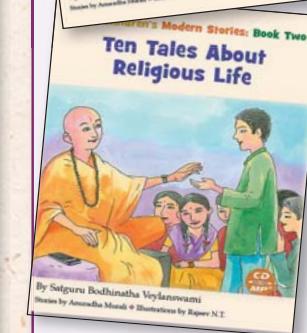
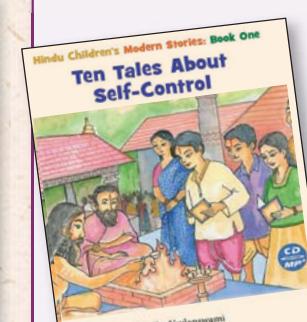
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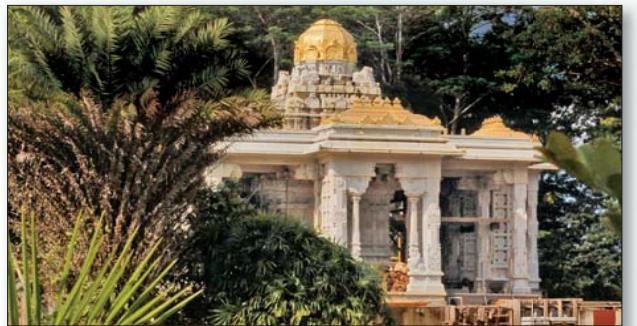


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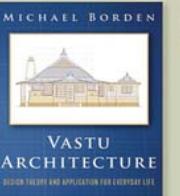
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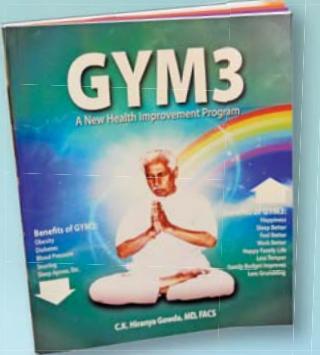
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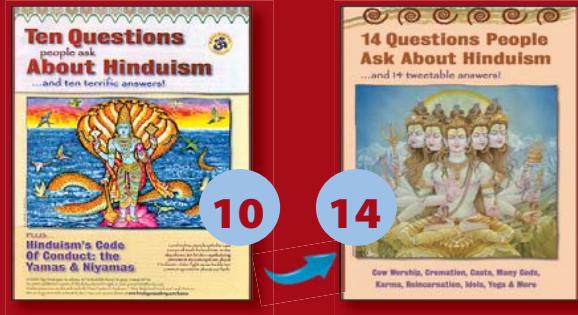
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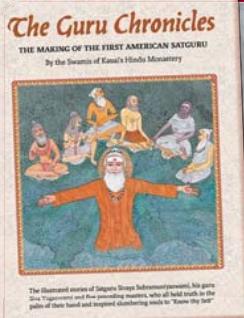
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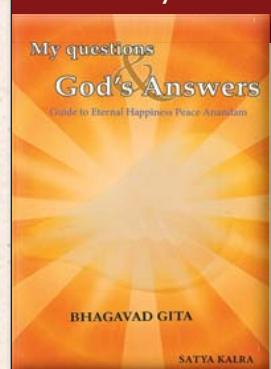
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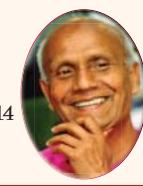
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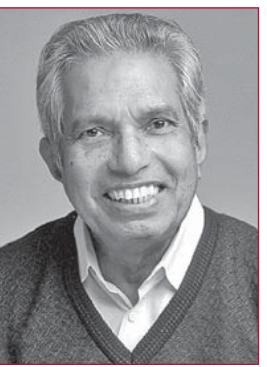
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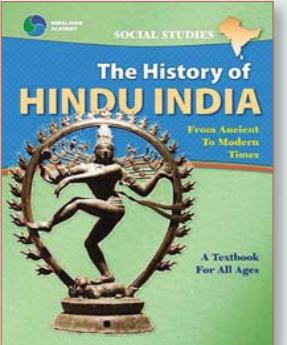
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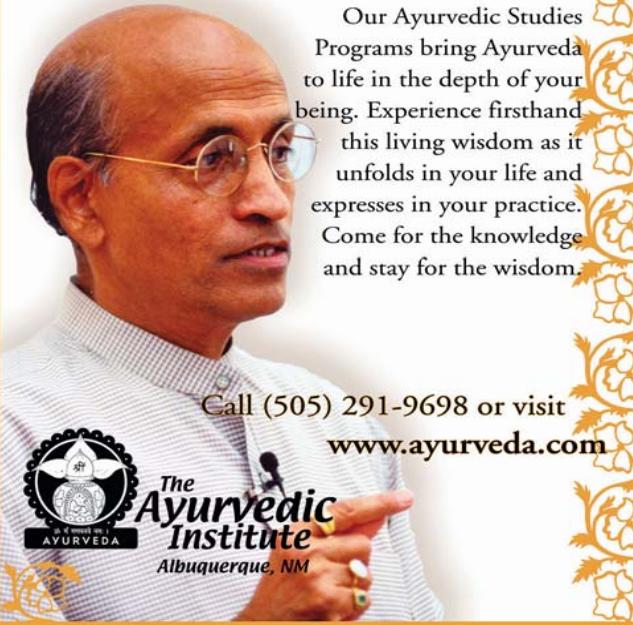
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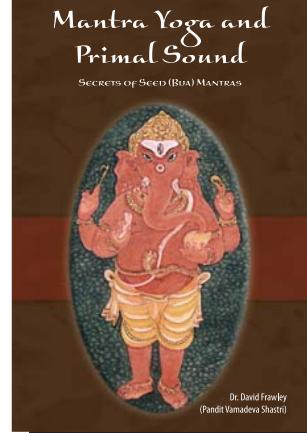
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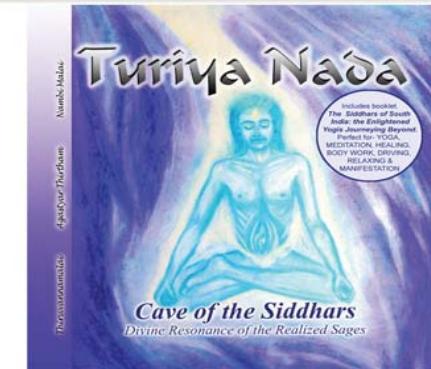
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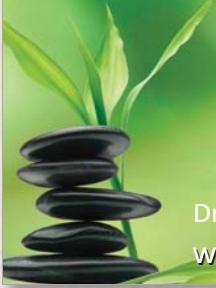
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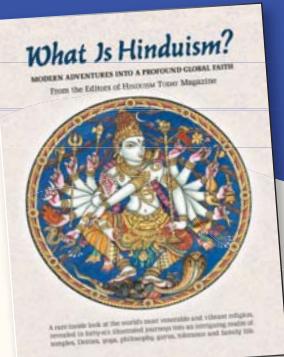
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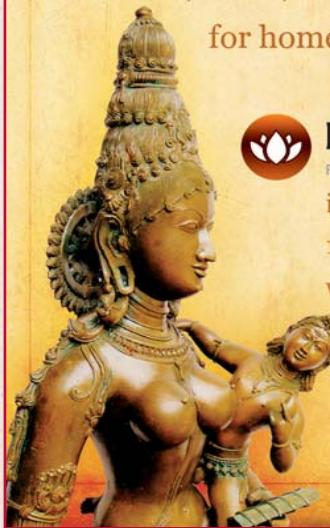
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DIGITAL DHARMA

By MADHURI SHEKHAR, LOS ANGELES

WEB SITES

New Site Tackles Tough Issues

THE NUMBER OF HINDU-FOCUSED NEWS portals are few, but a new, upcoming presence on the Internet hopes to fill that gap. *The Chakra* is a website that aggregates news stories relating to the four "dharmaic faiths"—Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. It has a particular focus on news overlooked by mainstream media. *The Chakra* has been active for over a year, and currently averages around 50,000 visitors a month. The publishing team consists of writers and volunteers from Canada, the UK and India, and they are aiming to expand their editorial team in India.

Sachin Rustagi, an investor and one of the site's early founders, says that *The Chakra* hopes to become the "Time Magazine of dharmaic faith," with an emphasis on deep level insight and analysis for political/religious news.

Critique: The articles could do with more citations and links to original sources

BEYOND EPUB

iBooks Author Unleashes Rich Publishing

WHEN APPLE ANNOUNCED ITS NEW publishing tool iBooks Author in January 2012, it heralded yet another sea change in the world of online publishing and eBook creation. Self-publishing online has been a viable option for many years, but any sophisticated incorporation of audio, video or advanced graphical content required expensive expertise. iBooks Author sets a new standard for the creation of visually stunning, media-rich, interactive and engaging eBooks that can be read on the iPad and other iOS devices and created by someone without coding skills. The iBooks Author opens up a multitude of possibilities for dharmaic educators to extend the power of digital textbooks, (which we discussed in the Jan/Feb/March 2011 issue), beyond just words and pictures.

THE CHAKRA

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to confirm veracity, especially since skeptical readers may already find the focus on crimes and violations against Hindus and Hindu institutions off-putting. Many pieces lack journalistic objectivity and really should be classified as opinion pieces (all articles end with a disclaimer that "The views and opinions expressed in this article are

those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the *The Chakra* website and staff.") Nevertheless, this is a promising venture from a group that seeks to protect Hindu rights and believes in promoting the Hindu voice and presence online.

See: www.chakranews.com

quizzes and more—all available at the flick of your finger. An indicator of the acceptance of iPads for education: Chicago's public schools have spent \$500,000 on iPads for students.

One limitation of the software is that any book in the iBooks 2 format can only be sold through Apple's iBookstore and only be played on an iOS device.

Since iBooks Author is relatively new, we have yet to see its full-fledged effects. But key textbook publishers—McGraw Hill and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and others—were quick to partner with Apple to offer media-rich textbooks. iBooks have a tremendous potential for Hindus to create beautiful, captivating, rich media books. Imagine embedded audio clips of shlokas, and a video feature on doing puja, "read-aloud" capabilities, interactive

